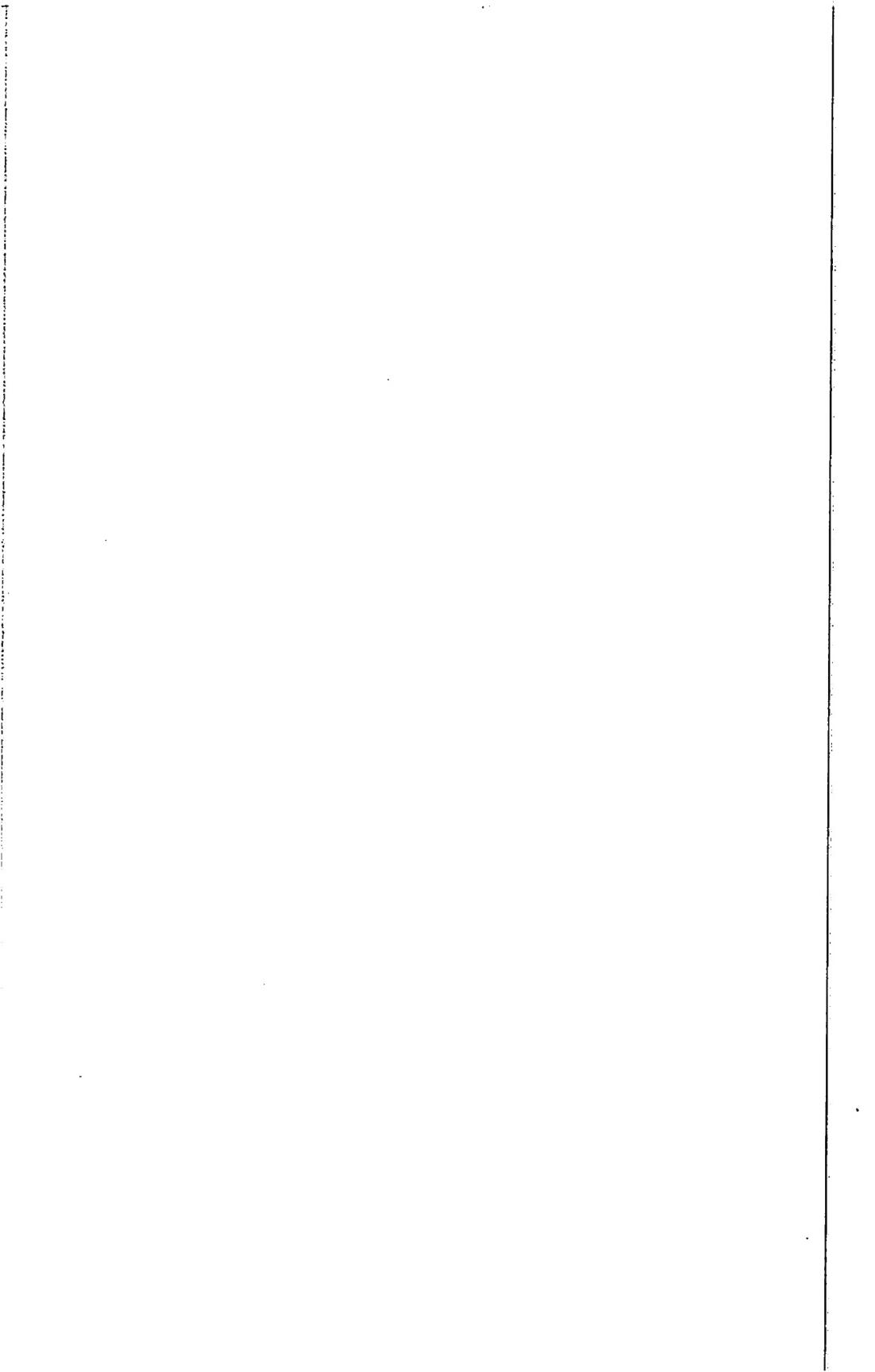


*The Beginnings  
of  
Our Religion*



BS  
1197  
B3

*The Beginnings  
of  
Our Religion*

EDNA M. BAXTER

THE JUDSON PRESS  
VALLEY FORGE

## THE BEGINNINGS OF OUR RELIGION

Copyright © 1968  
The Judson Press, Valley Forge, Pa. 19481

All rights in this book are reserved. No part of the text may be reproduced in any manner without permission in writing from the publisher, except in the case of brief quotations in a review of the book in a magazine or newspaper.

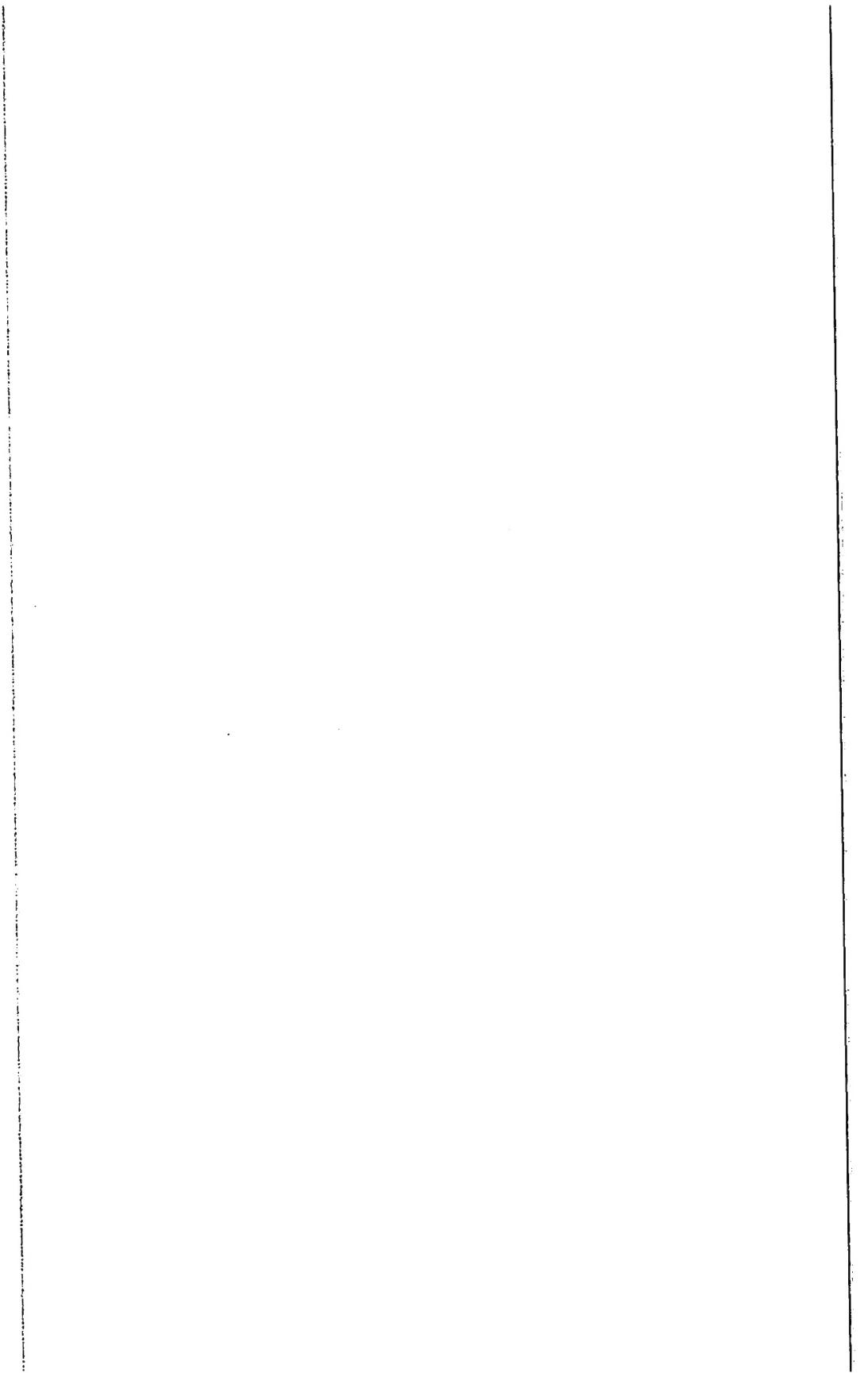
Except where otherwise indicated, the Bible quotations in this volume are in accordance with the Revised Standard Version of the Bible, copyright 1946 and 1952 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America, and are used by permission.

Library of Congress Catalog Card No. 67-25890

Printed in the U.S.A.

In memory of  
my mother

226655



## *Contents*

Preface	9
Part I At the Dawn of History	
1. Searching the Secrets of the Past	15
2. People Before the Bible	27
3. Flood Stories	37
4. Ancient Writings – Our Textbooks of the Past	43
Part II Egypt and the Hebrews	
5. Egyptian Civilization	53
6. Nobler Religion in Egypt	59
7. While Hebrews Lived in Egypt	67
8. The Hebrews Enslaved in Egypt	71
Part III Life and Worship in a New Land	
9. The Hebrew Struggle for a New Life in Canaan	83
10. Ancient Life in Canaan	91
11. Primitive Religion of the Hebrews in Canaan	101
12. Arks for the Gods	115
Part IV Under the Rule of Kings	
13. Kings Rule the Hebrews	123
14. Yahweh, the God of the Hebrews	135
15. God Speaks Through the Prophets	143

<b>Part V</b>	<b>Exile and Return</b>	
16.	The Exiled Jews Learned More of God	155
17.	Return to Jerusalem	163
18.	Religion After the Exile	169
<b>Part VI</b>	<b>The Making of the Old Testament</b>	
19.	Writing the Old Testament (Part 1)	183
20.	Writing the Old Testament (Part 2)	193
21.	The Psalmist and God	213
<b>Part VII</b>	<b>From the Old Testament to the New</b>	
22.	The Jewish Struggle for Independence	227
23.	God's Love Brought to Man	235
24.	The Revelation of God in the Bible	245
<b>References for Further Study</b>		251

## *Preface*

THIS BOOK HAS BEEN WRITTEN for laymen, especially for teachers and young folks in the churches and colleges. It may serve as a book for the home or as a course for adolescents or adults. A bibliography may be found in the back of the book.

The author has found that adult laymen, as well as young folks, are often confused in their ideas of the Old Testament. Piecemeal and haphazard reading of stories and samplings fail to be properly understood for lack of context and a lack of knowledge of the background of the times involved. Readers need an overall understanding of the literature, history, and times. Most of the Old Testament writings cover a period from about 1200 B.C. to 100 B.C. The books vary in type, viewpoints, and time of writing. The Old Testament writers and the people about whom they wrote had a different world view from our own. This must be well understood. The subject of the Bible books is God, the source of all natural and human life, the Father of all men.

Because an appreciation of the Bible and its religion is so dependent upon an understanding of the development of biblical thought (particularly of human relations, worship, and God), lay teachers, parents, and young people may find this book of great value for themselves. By far, the most thrilling approach to the Bible is that of the development of its religion and its history. The study of the Bible in a developmental way clears up obscurities, gives perspective on primitive concepts,

and leads to an appreciation of the nobler religious heights reached by the prophets and Jesus.

Inasmuch as the Old Testament is an attempt by many writers, living at different periods, to present the religious experiences of the Hebrews, it seems desirable to become familiar with some of the varied phases of this religious development. The material presented in the Old Testament covers a period of approximately two thousand years. It is important to remember that most of what is written came into existence during the last eight or nine hundred years of that long period and largely only three or four hundred years before the time of Jesus. Much of the viewpoint of the editors belongs to the period after the Exile (after 538 B.C.). This makes the Old Testament very difficult and confusing, especially when isolated episodes are presented or read without reference to their literary or historical setting.

Fundamental to an understanding of the Bible is an exploratory experience in the growth and development of the Hebrew understandings of God, worship, and life. Primitive ideas need to be seen vividly and contrasted with nobler, truer teachings of the prophets and Jesus. In these latter teachings will be a clearer revelation of the nature of God.

In the closing chapters, attention has been given to the development of Hebrew literature. Some readers may prefer to read these chapters first. From time to time the reader should recall his awareness of the Hebrew methods of writing. Frequent illustrations will enable him to see writers of different periods rewriting the Hebrew story and incorporating in it their later understanding of God, worship, and laws. The Hebrew practice of combining different records into one book, and that of editing older materials, and the placing side by side contrasting and even contradictory materials should be noted. Finally, it should be recognized that ancient names, such as Abraham, Jacob, or Moses, were frequently used by authors who presented later customs and ideas. Perhaps this association with such venerable characters lent power and an air of authenticity to the views that later writers wished to impress upon the people of Israel.

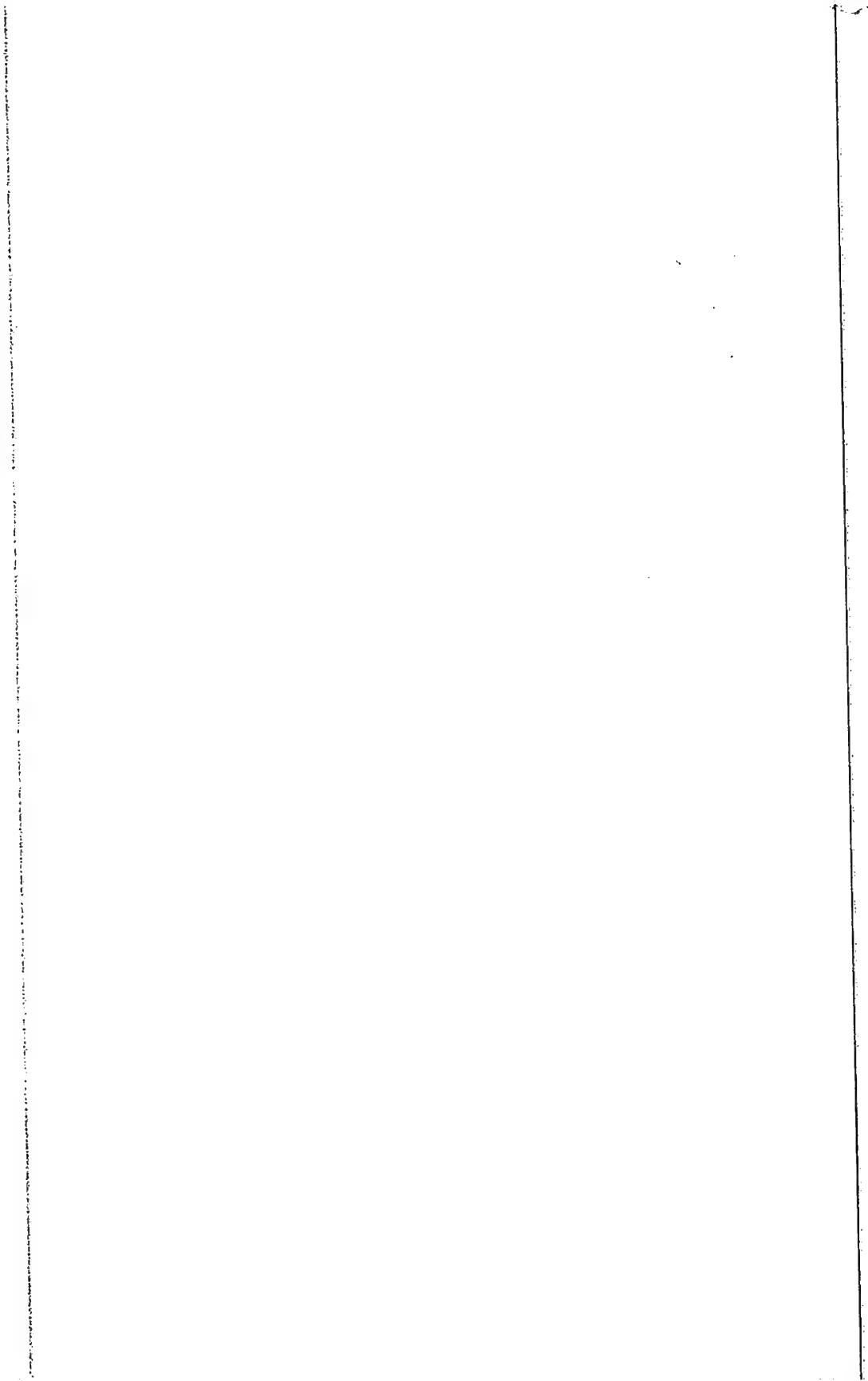
The careful reader may notice that a variety of spellings of some ancient names appear in this book. The reason, of course,

is that there is no single correct spelling in English for names written in languages which used an alphabet different from ours. Basically in this book the editors have followed the spellings used in *Harper's Bible Dictionary*, except in materials quoted verbatim from other books in the English language.

Special thanks are due to Charles Scribner's Sons for permission to quote from *The Dawn of Conscience*, by J. H. Breasted; to Harvard University Press for permission to quote from *The Harvard Theological Review*; and to the National Council of Churches for permission to quote passages from the Revised Standard Version. Unless otherwise designated, the biblical quotations are from this source. Thanks are also due to Harper & Row, Publishers for permission to quote from *The Holy Bible: A New Translation* by James Moffatt.

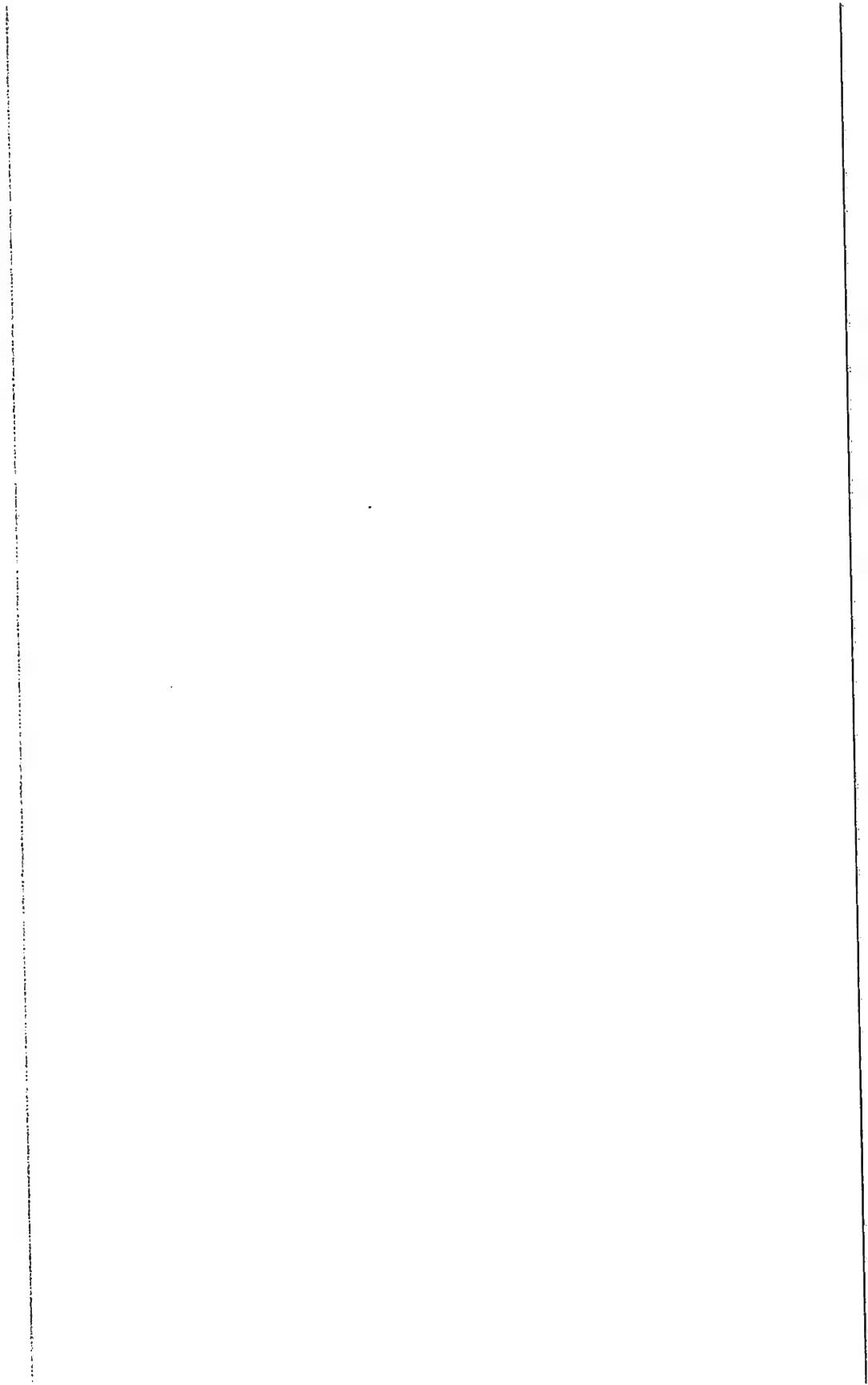
Years of teaching and writing have brought to this volume the resources of so many scholars, colleagues, and students that there is no way to trace the many sources involved. Sincere thanks are due to all such.

EDNA M. BAXTER



*I*

*At the Dawn  
of  
History*



# *I*

## *Searching the Secrets of the Past*

BURIED IN THE MISTY PAST of thousands of years ago lie the beginnings of our religion. In those faraway times there was no Bible, for the Hebrew tribes of that day had no written language and kept no records. Only because the stories they told were passed by word of mouth from one generation to another through countless centuries have we any idea about what happened.

Even so, we cannot take the stories as we find them, for we know that they underwent changes in the telling and retelling. Like so many coats of paint on an old house the old stories have been built up layer by layer, and the layers must be peeled off if we are to see what is beneath. Fortunately, thanks to the amazing detective work of Bible scholars, historians, and archaeologists, it is possible for us to see something of what really happened in the dim, distant times when men began to recognize the God who had created them.

### *Ancient Tales*

An illustration of the problem of understanding the Old Testament is seen at the opening of the Book of Genesis, where we find two different stories of creation side by side. The oldest and most primitive one appears in the second chapter, and was probably put down in written form between 950 B.C. and 850 B.C. A much later story of creation in the first chapter of Genesis was written between c. 500 B.C and 400 B.C. by a priest

whose group rewrote and arranged old writings as we have them today in the first five books of the Old Testament. In this process, each writer emphasized his own viewpoint.

Evidence of the primitive nature of some of the stories may be seen in the belief that men sometimes were pictured as having a god for a parent (cf. Genesis 6:4).

These ideas of faraway beginnings were often passed along first in oral form by fascinated Hebrews who probably never asked whether the tales were true but added to what they had heard. So the stories were polished into a thrilling form by the telling. It is likely that many people who told a story made it say what they believed about the past. Today, we are different, and we ask: What were the facts? Which parts are really true? In reading the Old Testament we often lack the background to understand these faraway people as they really were.

Legends of dim and distant characters or tribes, like Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph, were recited and polished into dramatic stories for centuries before they were ever written down. Later people used them to explain many things. Some of the customs which linger in these tales reveal ancient ways, illustrated by the blessing at the deathbed of Jacob (Genesis 49), the account of the precious family images stolen by Rachel from her father Laban (Genesis 31:19, 32), a hint of adoption (Genesis 15:2-4), the giving of a handmaiden to a husband (Genesis 16:2), or the sale of a birthright (Genesis 25:31-34). Many legends concerning man are contained in the books of Genesis and Joshua. They are told to explain the origins of names, places, sanctuaries, cult practices, customs, and geographical conditions. Through these legends we can gain insights about how the people thought and felt.

It is important to remember that the Old Testament as we now have it was largely edited and arranged by certain Jews of the southern kingdom of Judah after their return from exile in Babylon in 538 B.C.<sup>1</sup> Prophetic books like Hosea were also edited in this period. The northern people of Israel had been conquered and many had been carried into captivity by the Assyrians in 722 B.C. Their writings and traditions were edited by the Judeans who centered in Jerusalem. The later editors and writers of Judah emphasized Temple worship, sacrifice, and

<sup>1</sup> See Chapters 19 and 20 for details.

obedience to the Law or Torah as we find it in the Pentateuch (first five books).

Today, as we read the Old Testament, it is important to recognize what the last editor or writer emphasized and believed. Materials from several sources or from different periods of time will show disagreements and differences. Most important for the reader is that he see the different levels of people and views about religion and God in these records. The chasm between those faraway viewpoints and those of our own time must be recognized.

### *Some Early Semites*

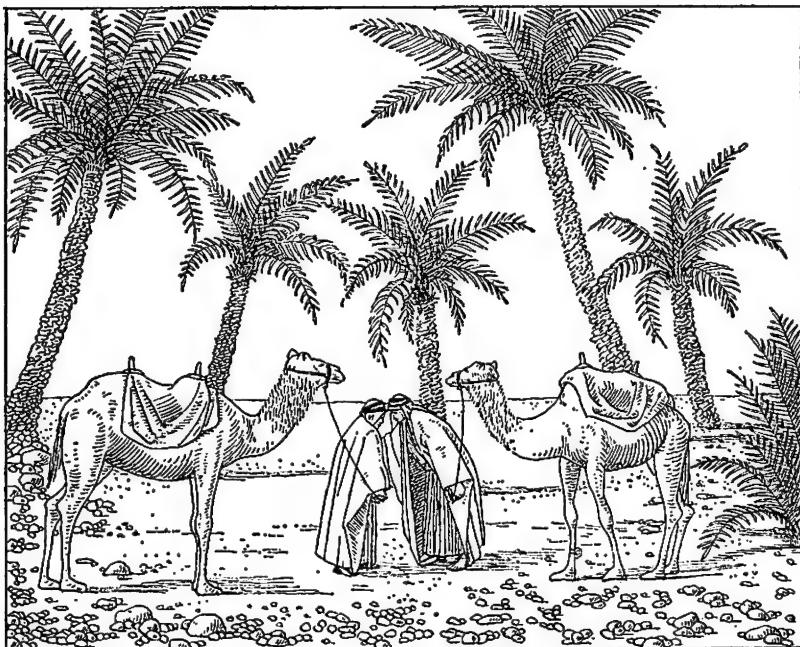
Something of the appearance of the nomadic Hebrews may be learned from a painting on the walls of a tomb in Egypt. During the rule of King Senwosret II of Egypt, a powerful nobleman, Khnumhotep II, lived at Beni-hasan, 169 miles above (south of) the present city of Cairo. On the walls of his famous tomb is a vivid scene of a visit paid to him about 1892 B.C. by thirty-seven Semites from Shutu in central Transjordan, bringing gifts to the court of the Egyptian ruler. The inscription of the painting reads: "The arrival, bringing eye-paint." Their leader bears the name, Absha. Asses are used for transportation. Such pictures give us some idea of customs, travel, and the costumes of early nomads.

### *Life in the Desert*

The beginnings of the people in the Bible are in or near the great Arabian Desert. In the oldest parts of the Bible there are references to such people as Canaanites, Amorites, Arameans, Babylonians, Assyrians, Ethiopians, and Hebrews. These were all Semites, but as they settled in different places they came to have distinctive names and cultures. These Semitic people, however, resembled each other in physical appearance, in institutions, in customs, in words, and in religious practices.

The ancestors of the Jews were of nomadic Hebrew tribes. They lived in tents and with their flocks on the edge of the Arabian Desert (Deuteronomy 32:10). Vast stretches of this desert offered the Hebrews in the midday only cloudless skies, burning sand, and rocks. There was nothing growing but parched shrubs. The night time brought coolness and a cover-

ing of sky and stars. The tribes moved their sheep, goats, asses, tents, and families to find needed water and growing things. Both man and beast were cheered by the sight of an oasis, where today, as then, water bubbles up from a spring in the midst of the sand and gives refreshment to thirsty caravans. Trees provided welcome fruit and shade.



At the close of a journey, when the Hebrews located a new home, black tents were set up until a village of tents had been arranged. Women probably did much of the work of setting up the tents as well as weaving them of black goat's hair. They also prepared cheese and gathered wild fruits. They made pottery jars and dishes in which to carry the water and prepare the food. With hand looms they wove cloth for their loose, ample garments, to give protection from the heat of the sun and warmth at night.

Hebrew tribes continued to live around the fertile edges of the Arabian Desert for many hundreds of years. Even today we find Arabs living around the great Arabian Desert in black

goat's hair tents. They keep flocks of sheep, goats, and camels, and live somewhat as the nomads lived thousands of years ago. The ways of this desert have not greatly changed, excepting that scholars have found that the early desert people did not have the camel until about 1100 B.C. Unlike previous travel with asses, nomads of later times with camels could travel over long stretches of the desert without water, because the camel could eat desert shrubs and bushes and could store up water. Camel nomads were able to live and travel in the desert where the ass nomad or the shepherd could not exist. Doubtless these first Hebrews could not travel far into the desert with their animals. A day's journey would have been not over twenty miles. They had to be near water to manage their flocks.

### *Movements of the Hebrews*

It was natural for the Hebrew tribes to seek the rich pastures of river valleys where they could find good food more easily for their flocks and themselves. Something of the nature of the invasions of the nomads from the desert may be imagined from an ancient letter of the Amorite King Zimri-Lin, found at Mari. He writes:

. . . the Benjaminites have taken to raiding. Once they made a raid, and took many sheep. I sent auxiliary troops against them, who slew their chieftains. Not one of them got away, and all the sheep which they had taken were returned.<sup>9</sup>

This same spirit is reflected in Genesis 49:27:

Benjamin is a ravenous wolf,  
in the morning devouring the prey,  
and at even dividing the spoil.

In the Bible there is a very ancient legend of a Hebrew tribe led by Abraham. With sheep, goats, and asses these Hebrews, we are told, wandered into the city of Ur. We read that later they went north and west from Ur to the land of Aram, and settled for a time in the city of Haran. The cities of Ur and Haran probably offered the Hebrews many good things in trade for their wool and sheep, but they, as true sons of the desert, doubtless preferred to live in their tents on the edges of Babylonia surrounded by their flocks. Some of these Hebrews

<sup>9</sup> *Biblical Archaeologist*, February, 1948, p. 17.

may have lived in Babylonia in the time of King Hammurabi, who sought the welfare of all his people.

It seems probable that Haran was the center from which migrations moved outward. When their numbers increased, this would lead tribes to a new search for land. The Hebrews perhaps heard of good pasture in the beautiful country of Canaan over by the Great Sea. It was "a land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees and pomegranates, a land of olive trees and honey" (Deuteronomy 8:8). So some of this Hebrew company set out to dwell there. Canaan also had the advantage of the presence of a river and lakes. To this land had already come a Semitic people called the Canaanites. Here they had developed cities, good agriculture, and writing.

There was a continuous infiltration of nomads from the Arabian Desert into the fertile areas. The first Hebrew tribes were not a united people. Unity came centuries later. A series of stories in Genesis tells of a group of Hebrews who entered Canaan under Abraham. Another series of stories tells about a Hebrew named Jacob, with an Aramaean ancestry, also coming to Canaan. It appears that there were invasions of several Hebrew tribes into Canaan, occurring at different times.

One group of such Hebrews went down to Egypt, probably in the time of the Hyksos invasion (1750-1550 B.C.) of Egypt and Canaan. If the Hyksos were friendly to the Hebrews at the time of their invasions of Egypt, it would have been a favorable time for the Hebrew tribes (perhaps 1720 B.C.) associated with the Joseph and Jacob stories to go to Egypt. Here they seem to have dwelt for several hundred years.

### *Finding Answers Without Books*

Four or five thousand years ago, when the Hebrews lived in the desert without books, schools, libraries, or scientists, it was necessary for them to discover for themselves a great deal about the world and religion. Sometimes they learned from their neighbors in Sumer, Accadia, Babylonia, Egypt, and Canaan. *El* is the oldest name we know, meaning God. An old name for the Hebrew nation is *Isra-el* which tells of something which *El* did for his people. It seems quite probable that the ancient Hebrew patriarchs worshiped *El* (translated Lord) as well as other gods.

And if you be unwilling to serve the Lord, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your fathers served in the region beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell; but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord (Joshua 24:15).

Before there were any scientists to help people to explain it, the Semites thought that breath was a spirit inside of people. They believed that when people died or even when they had dreams, there was a living spirit which left the body and visited distant places. So they came to think that ghosts (cf. Job 4:12-17) visited men, and men feared and honored them. The Semites called them by the name *el* or by the name of a person who had died.

As they thought there was a ghost or spirit living in people, they believed spirits dwelt in trees, springs, rivers, wells, stones, and mountains. Everything that moved or had life seemed to them to show the power of a spirit. The movement of the sun, moon, and stars, the floating of clouds, the crash of thunder, the flash of lightning, the rustle of leaves, and the flowing of water were believed by ancient people to indicate that these things were possessed by spirits. Here is what the ancient Babylonian neighbors of the Hebrews said about their gods:

The highest walls, the thickest walls, like a flood they pass.  
From house to house they break through.  
No door can shut them out, no bolt can turn them back.  
Through the door like a snake they glide,  
Through the hinge like a wind they blow.<sup>8</sup>

Doubtless many of the "sacred places" of the Hebrews in Canaan were taken over from people whom they conquered. Special trees such as the oaks connected with Abraham (cf. Genesis 18:1), the burning bush in the Moses story (cf. Exodus 3:1-5), or stories connected with Jacob's dream at Bethel (cf. Genesis 28:10-22) are later explanations of "sacred places" taken over by the Hebrews, and show an early belief in spirits within inanimate things.

To find the will of God, or the truth, or the right thing to do, people cast sacred lots, called Urim and Thummim (cf. Deuteronomy 33:8; 1 Samuel 14:41, 42). Even witchcraft was practiced by Saul as seen in his visit to the witch of Endor (cf.

<sup>8</sup> Lewis Bayles Paton, *The Early Religion of Israel* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1910) p. 13.

1 Samuel 28:3-19). Hence we must realize that religion among the early Hebrews was primitive.

Magic may be seen in Moses' use of a brass serpent on a pole to heal the Hebrews of their bites by serpents (cf. Numbers 21:4-9). Transferring sins of the people to a goat sent into the wilderness is another magical practice (cf. Leviticus 16:20-22). Making a covenant between two parties by sprinkling on both some of an animal's blood — the source of life — came later to be used in a covenant with Yahweh (cf. Exodus 24:1-8). It is from such beginnings that we are awestricken to see the growth of their faith into one of the noblest and highest. These ancient stories show the struggle of these people as they tried to live and to be religious.

In reading the Bible it is important to recognize that God came to people in the framework of their own cultures, and concepts of his nature grew and developed over the centuries. Contrasting the primitive with the higher concepts is helpful to the modern reader. Only the highest concepts of God and his will should be accepted by the reader of the Bible today.

For all who read the Old Testament it is important to remember that the God of the universe has always been the same. The Hebrews came to know and worship him with their many human and cultural limitations. It was these people, not God, who changed and grew toward the truth. The reader needs to be aware of their limitations as well as the eternal truth of God which came to them as they were able to understand it.

### *A Recent Nomadic Conversation*

Here is a portion of a conversation of an Arab teacher visiting some nomadic people in *recent times*.

**ARAB TEACHER:** Peace be to you.

**SHEIK:** The same to you. What a beautiful night. Look at the stars and the moon. They are so bright. This is good luck.

**FIRST ARAB:** Yes, we have very good luck in finding pasture for our sheep.

**SECOND ARAB:** And plenty of water for all.

**THIRD ARAB:** What makes the light in the stars?

**SECOND ARAB:** Is there a spirit in the moon?

**FIRST ARAB:** What makes the plants grow?

**THIRD ARAB:** Why does water move?

SHEIK: There are spirits in these things.

FIRST ARAB: What holds up the sky?

SHEIK: Are you able to answer these questions?

ARAB TEACHER: [Then began his more modern answers.]

SECOND ARAB: Today after I gave water to my donkeys and drank myself, I lay down beside a rock to sleep. I was very tired and soon fell asleep. Then suddenly a stone flew over and hit me. Why do you think this happened?

SHEIK: Hum! Did you ask the spirit's permission to give water to your folks and to yourself?

THIRD ARAB: You should not be careless about this. Every place where there is water and where trees are growing is owned by a spirit. We must please the spirit before we do anything else.

### *The Importance of Water to Desert People*

The worship of spirits in water at springs, wells, and rivers is very common among many peoples and easy to account for, since water is so precious for the life of plant, animal, and man. Let us try to understand how important water would be to people in the desert. This country of Arabia is fifteen hundred miles long and varies from six to twelve hundred miles wide. It is a dreary land with rocky mountains separated by un-watered plains. Only a few thorny plants can grow in it. There is almost no rainfall, and there are no rivers. The only places where things can grow well are where the water comes up out of the ground and makes a spring and an oasis. Underground water seems mysterious in a dry desert. Many people wonder why it appears in one place and not in another.

Let us imagine the early Hebrews on a journey in the desert wilderness of Arabia. They are crossing over high stretches of flat, rocky land walled in by hot mountains of bare rock and finding nothing alive except some thirsty herbs and a few grey, thorny acacia trees. Coming to a top of a ridge, they suddenly behold a new world. The asses, flocks, and people quicken their pace, and soon they are under a spread-out canopy of stately palm trees which give them shade against the blazing heat of the sun. Ground water rises to the surface making possible a carpet of growing plants as well as refreshment for beast and man.

*Sacred Wells and Springs*

Ancient people of Arabia believed that the water around the palm trees in the underground stream was inhabited by an *el* or spirit responsible for the springs, streams, and underground flow. The Hebrews referred to flowing water as "living" water; a spirit seemed to make it move. In one of the oldest bits of Hebrew poetry, the well or fountain is addressed as a living being:

Spring up, O well! — Sing to it! —  
the well which the princes dug,  
which the nobles of the people delved,  
with the scepter and with their staves (Numbers 21:17, 18).

This old song of the well is said to have been sung at Beer in Moab. It suggests that some important chief had dug the well and sung songs to it. In this very same place in recent times Arabs have been found practicing the same custom. This is what they have sung:

Spring up, O well!  
Flow copiously!  
Drink and disdain not;  
With a staff have we dug it.

Probably when the ancient Hebrews came to the well, they called to the spirit so as to let it know that they were coming. Then they danced around the well singing songs. Sacred wells are among the oldest objects of reverence among the Semites. Around Arabia, until recent times, springs have been considered the dwelling places of spirits. Peasant women of many faiths have been known to ask the permission of these spirits before drawing the water. People have often come to these waters to seek the healing of their diseases.

In the countries around Arabia successful crops depend more upon the water supply than anything else. The flowing of a stream, the fall of rain or its absence, which we regard as natural processes, seemed to indicate the presence and power of a god. The Semites worshiped these supposed deities, hoping to win and keep their favor to get good crops.

In the conflict over wells in Genesis 26:12-33, we notice the redigging of the famous wells. Of this series of events, it is said: "So Isaac built an altar here and worshiped the Eternal,

and pitched his tent" (Moffatt). Genesis 26:32, 33 tells that Isaac received a report from his slave that they had dug a well and had found water. Therefore Isaac gave it a special name, *Shibah*.

### *Power of Custom*

Looking back on ancient times in Canaan, one of the Hebrew writers says, "Every man did that which was right in his own eyes" (Judges 17:6). Custom remained more forceful than laws or rulers. Many old customs of the Hebrews persisted in Canaan. One writer declared, "Such a thing is not done in Israel" (2 Samuel 13:12).

The iron rule of custom may be seen in the practice of blood revenge, by which a person was killed to appease the god. As we read the story of Cain's quarrel with his brother Abel, we can feel deeply what this idea of blood revenge meant to the people:

Then the Eternal [the Lord] asked Cain, "Where is your brother Abel?" "How do I know?" said Cain; "am I a shepherd to my brother?" He answered, "What have you done? Listen, your brother's blood is crying to me from the soil! And now you are cursed off the country that has opened to swallow down the brother's blood you shed; after this, the fields will not yield you their produce, when you till them; you must go stumbling and straying over the earth" (Genesis 4:9-13, Moffatt).

The power of this sentence is felt so terribly by Cain that he replies: "My punishment is more than I can bear. Thou art expelling me from the country . . . I must go stumbling and straying over the earth, and anyone who catches me will kill me" (Genesis 4:13-14 Moffatt). The blood of the one Cain had killed cried out from the ground until it was revenged.

### *God Was Making Himself Known to the Hebrews*

The people of the early Hebrew tribes, like the other Semites, knew very little about religion and life as we know it today. They were wrong in some things which they believed, as, for instance, when they thought that the wind was made by some spirit's blowing hard. When a stream flowed gently they said the spirit was asleep, and when the stream was disturbed they said the spirit was angry. They could think of things happening

in nature only because of something which was alive and doing these things. They knew little about the laws and processes of nature and at first they were far from realizing that there is but one God.

Yet these early people were preparing the way for us to know how God works in the world. To them we owe our belief in one God. God has given men minds and freedom to grow and learn. In the Bible we see that God was making himself known to the Hebrews, and later to the Jews and the Christians.

The Hebrews became the Jews. Their distinctiveness lies in their religion, their writings (the Old Testament), and their culture over a period of many centuries. Otherwise, they resembled the other people around them. In Exodus 12:38 reference is made to the Hebrews as "a mixed multitude." Of Jerusalem it is said, "Your father was an Amorite, and your mother a Hittite" (Ezekiel 16:3). So it seems that no one who is called a Jew has inherited racial purity.

## 2

# *People Before the Bible*

THE PEOPLE OF THE WORLD OF THE OLD TESTAMENT lived in the lands near the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers, near the Jordan River in Canaan, and in Egypt near the Nile River. The earliest Hebrews lived as nomadic tribes with their asses, sheep, and goats. They possessed no lands, formal government, or writers to make themselves widely known.

Before the records in the Bible, there were already great civilizations around the Tigris-Euphrates Valley, the Jordan and the Nile Rivers. Scholars have learned much about these people from their writings, pyramids, temples, tombs, and other ruins. Archaeologists have dug up quantities of things which give much information about these ancient people. From the earliest times in man's progress into civilization, the lowland between the Persian Gulf and the Nile River Valley has been a pathway from Persia into Mesopotamia westward to the Mediterranean and along its coast, into the Nile Valley. This route formed an arc of fertile land at the northern end of the great Arabian Desert, called the Fertile Crescent. There have been several great migrations of peoples along this route.

The flooding of the great rivers of Egypt and Mesopotamia aided man to raise crops. When man settled along them, he changed from a nomadic hunter into a tiller of the land, and he built cities. Between 4000 and 3500 B.C., both Egypt and Mesopotamia developed advanced cultures. Trade in early times was carried as far as Syria. Here, in the coastal port city of

Byblos, archaeologists have uncovered very ancient ruins. A visitor may walk here amidst the ruins of temples and tombs of these faraway times. It was to Byblos that the Egyptians brought their papyrus reeds to be manufactured into the papyrus which was so much used for their writing.

### *The Sumerians*

Some time after 4000 B.C. a round-headed people without beards came from the Persian mountains into the southern part of the plain of Shinar between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. Certain scholars believe they have found here a peasant-village culture. These Sumerians took over and gradually created the earliest civilization in this area and perhaps the earliest in the world. The Sumerians developed the important cities of Ur, Eridu, Larsa, Erech, Kish and Nippur, each with its own ruler (about 2800-2400 B.C.).

Irrigation was used to bring water to the soil for their crops. The Sumerians were apparently the first people to cultivate grains from wild grasses; these in time became wheat and barley. They raised cattle, sheep, and goats. With a steady and abundant food supply the population increased.

They possessed good codes<sup>1</sup> of laws which Hammurabi was to use for his own famous code. The Sumerians invented cuneiform writing, using wedge-shaped characters to represent ideas and syllables. This way of writing on clay tablets was later adopted by their Accadian neighbors and continued to be used in this region until after the time of Alexander the Great, who died in 323 B.C. The Sumerian language affected other languages such as Arabic and Hebrew.

The city of Nippur, which is about one hundred miles south of modern Baghdad in Iraq, was once a great cultural center of Sumer. Excavators<sup>2</sup> here have discovered several thousand clay tablets and fragments. Most of these tablets were sun-baked. The oldest ones date back to 3000 B.C. From them we

<sup>1</sup> Samuel Noah Kramer has translated a sun-baked clay tablet containing laws created by King Ur-Nammu, who ruled over Sumer and Ur about 2050 B.C.

<sup>2</sup> In 1889 and 1900 most of the Sumerian clay tablets were found at Nippur. Today they are chiefly located in the University Museum at Philadelphia and the Museum of the Ancient Orient at Istanbul.

learn that in Sumer was started what is thought to be the oldest literature in the world. The Sumerians had many myths, epics, tales, fables, and essays. They asked many questions about the earth, the air (or wind), the planets, the stars, the sea, and creation itself. They thought of the earth as being flat with a heaven stretched over it. Between heaven and earth was a substance meaning "wind" (air, breath, or spirit). The sun, moon, planets, and stars were of this same substance. Above, below, and around the "heaven-earth" was a boundless sea.

Who created such an immovable universe? From the oldest clay records, we gather that the Sumerians believed invisible beings or gods planned and controlled this universe. Each invisible god was in charge of a particular part of the universe, such as the earth, the heaven, the sea, the air, the wind, the storms, the rivers, and the mountains.

The Sumerians worshiped a storm god who dwelt in the mountains. They built his temple on top of a high mound to imitate the mountain near where they first had lived. We call this mountain house a ziggurat, which really means tower.

Anu was heaven, and was also the force which lifted the universe out of chaos and insured order, law, and customs among people. Enlil, a fatherly deity, enforced the decrees of the assembly of the gods and sent a flood to destroy mankind. Ea, also called Enki, the water god, "Lord of the Deep," carried out the plans of Enlil and had charge of divine laws. Sin was the power in the moon. Shamash was the power in the sun. Adad was the power in the thunder. Ninhursag was the Sumerian mother goddess, the mother of living things.

Many answers to Sumerian questions were given in their stories or myths. The most ancient known story of the flood has been recorded on tablets found at Nippur which contain also the "Epic of Creation." On one of these tablets a deity refers to the gods who created the universe:

After Anu, Enlil, Enki, and Ninhursag  
Had created the dark-headed peoples  
Creatures with the breath of life on earth he made plentiful.  
The cattle of the field, them that are four legged, on the plains  
he called into being as was fitting.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Jack Finegan, *Light From the Ancient Past* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, © 1946), p. 26. Used by permission.

Farther on, the tablet gives an account of the king of Shuruppak, Ziusudra, and how he was told to build a houseboat to save mankind in a flood:

By my hand shall a deluge be sent upon the . . .

The seed of mankind shall perish in destruction.

This is the decision, the command of the assembly of the gods.<sup>4</sup>

When the terrible deluge came, Ziusudra found refuge in his great boat.

The rain storms, mighty winds all of them, they sent all at once.

The Flood came upon the . . .

When for seven days and seven nights,

The Flood had raged over the Land,

And the huge boat had been tossed on the great waters by the storms,  
The Sun-god arose shedding light in Heaven and on Earth.

Ziusudra made an opening in the side of the great ship.

He let the light of the hero the Sun-god enter in the great ship.

Ziusudra, the king,

Before the Sun-god he bowed his face to the ground.

The king slaughtered an ox, sheep, he sacrificed in great numbers.<sup>5</sup>

So when the mighty storm had ended, King Ziusudra was given "an eternal soul like that of a god" and in his immortal state he dwelt "in an inaccessible mountain," perhaps in southwestern Iran where the sun rises.

Different versions of the flood story have been found. The Sumerian story from Nippur of the Flood is dated about 1700 B.C. Here we have noted the hero to be Ziusudra. In the Nineveh story of the seventh century B.C. he is Uta-Naphish-tum.

In Mesopotamia the mountain seemed to be a place of mysterious power. Here was the home of the gods. Here all natural forces were concentrated. The body of the deity grew out of the mountain, and plants grew out of its sides. Goats fed on these plants. The life-giving rain was brought from the mountain by the god of weather. In their cities the Sumerians developed communication with the gods by erecting artificial mountains for their temples. The temples revealed the piety of the people and ensured divine protection.

The deity was considered to be the owner of the city. At Erech, the temple of the god Anu was on a mound forty feet

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 27.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

high and it covered an area of about 420,000 square feet. Here were found some of the earliest clay tablets of the Sumerians giving directions for the work to be done by the people under temple management.

The temple controlled and managed the land for its divine head. Each citizen belonged to a temple community. All people were equal in service. Part of the land was worked by all the people of the community or city. Some land was also allotted to people for their private use. The temple supplied the seed, the animals, and the instruments for the cultivation of the "fields of the god." The priest who stood at the head of the temple assigned the work and supervised the labor. At some temples there was a special area for the sheep and for their shearing. Here slave girls prepared and spun the wool. The temple owned woods, date groves, orchards, and vineyards for the growing of fruits.

Citizens working for the temple were organized into groups under their own foremen. Most citizens were practical farmers, but along with their farming they carried on some craft or trade.

These Sumerian cities were unique. Here was an agricultural life carried on under a god. The Sumerians developed these cities around the artificial mountains or ziggurats on which they built elaborate temples. On this elaborate high place the majesty of the gods was made central to the life of the people.

Periodically there were celebrations of the seasons. Several days in each month were set aside for the celebration of the different phases of the moon and other natural occurrences. In this way, a strong bond with nature was maintained. The people believed that man was created to serve the gods.

Apart from these cities or separate communities there was no central power. This probably made it possible for them to be conquered by invaders. Thus it came about that the Sumerians were conquered by some Semitic invaders from Arabia who created another civilization to the north of Sumer, known as the Accadian.

### *Accad*

Some time between 3000 and 2500 B.C., Semitic nomads from the Arabian Desert without the art of writing or a settled

culture had invaded the lands near the Euphrates north of Sumer. Here they learned to cultivate the land and they built city life. These nomadic people borrowed much from the Sumerians to their south. They learned the Sumerian cuneiform way of writing. They absorbed many Sumerian words and came under the influence of the literature of the Sumerians. The Accadian versions of the Sumerian *Epic of Creation* and *The Epic of Gilgamesh* have been discovered on some of their old, broken clay tablets, now in the British Museum. Among their many gods, the great one was Marduk.

The Accadian control over Mesopotamia lasted from 2400 to 2200 B.C. Their greatest ruler was Sargon I, who extended his rule into Syria as far as the Mediterranean. The power and splendor of Sargon's rule completely changed the manner of living of his Semitic people. In place of tents, they built houses of sun-dried bricks. They learned to carve stone and developed other arts. Royal inscriptions and business documents began to be written in the Semitic language which is called Accadian. We have an inscription in which Sargon says of himself:

Sargon, the mighty king, the king of Akkad, am I. My mother was humble, my father I did not know, the brother of my father lived in the mountains. My city is Azupiranu, on the bank of the Euphrates. My humble mother conceived me; she bore me in secret, placed me in an ark of bulrushes, made fast my door with pitch and gave me to the river which did not overwhelm me. The river lifted me up and carried me to Akki the irrigator. . . . Akki the irrigator hauled me out. . . . Akki the irrigator took me to his son and brought me up.<sup>9</sup>

The kings who followed Sargon of Accad continued, as he had done, to maintain their rule over a centralized state.

### *The Amorites*

The Amorites also were nomads from the Syrian Desert, who invaded the kingdoms of Sumer and Accad. Their ancestors had settled in the fortified cities of Megiddo, Jericho, Gezer, Lachish, and Jerusalem. The Amorites must have developed the strong cities which the Hebrews of the thirteenth century found so difficult to take in Canaan. By 2050 B.C., the Amorites had seized the town of Babylon on the Euphrates and held it until 1750 B.C. They made it so outstanding that all of the old

<sup>9</sup> Finegan, *op. cit.*, p. 38.

Plain of Shinar came to be called Babylonia. By 1800 B.C. practically the whole region from the Mediterranean Sea to the highlands of Elam was ruled by Amorite princes. Numerous cities were under these princes. This old Babylonian (as it was known) civilization became the greatest one in Mesopotamia. It grew out of the union of special, independent, warring city-states such as Babylon, Lagash, Ur, and Erech.

After a century of warfare and conquest, Hammurabi became the sixth king. He defeated Zimri-Lin and ruled sometime after 2000 B.C. He drove back the Elamite invaders with great vigor. He brought order such as the land had never known before. We have learned much about him from his letters on clay tablets.

Under the Amorites a great canal system was used to irrigate the land and push back the desert. Their cities were enclosed in high walls. The streets were narrow and the houses were crowded together. They still used the Sumerian type of temple tower or ziggurat lifted up above the flat city streets.

During Babylonia's greatest strength, it controlled Palestine, to its west. At the battle of Megiddo in 1479 B.C., Pharaoh Thutmose III of Egypt defeated the Babylonians and made Palestine a vassal of his own land. Then the old Babylonia began to decline because of such invaders as the Cassites, the Elamites, and the Hittites. The Elamites plundered Ur and its royal tombs. The Hittites centered their rule mostly in Asia Minor between 1700 and 1200 B.C. It was many centuries later before another Kingdom of Babylon arose under Nabopolassar, who ruled from 624 to 605 B.C.

### *Excavations of Amorite Culture at Mari*

The fascinating Amorite culture has been uncovered at the vast excavations of eighteenth-century B.C. Mari on the middle Euphrates. Over twenty thousand inscribed cuneiform tablets were found here. The 250-room palace of the Amorite king Zimri-Lin, a friend of Hammarabi who later became his vassal, has been explored. It covered several acres and was so modern as to have hot and cold water, bathtubs of terra-cotta, and toilet facilities. What life in the palace was like is revealed by the courts, vestibules, halls, offices, reception rooms, the throne room, small chamber-guest rooms, kitchens, and cellars. On

the walls are colorful mural frescoes with figures of men, camels, birds, and deities. Their art, sculpture, and architecture reflect an amazing culture. Two school rooms with earthen benches were found. Between them was a chapel where the statue of a god had once stood.

An elaborate Temple of Ishtar was also found. It was one of four temples that had been built here over the centuries. To it, the people brought gifts of statuettes, vases, jewels, and other offerings. Not far from the palace of Mari was found a ziggurat<sup>7</sup> of great height. Everywhere in Mari there is evidence of reverence for the gods. At one side of the ziggurat was a temple, before which there was an altar for sacrifice. This seems to have been a temple of Dagon, king of the land. Dagon was considered to be a good god. Later, the Philistines adopted Dagon as a fish god (cf. 1 Samuel 5:1-5). Also among the Amorite gods was Hadad, god of rain and storms, associated with figures of the bull and thunderbolt. Hadad became known as the great Baal of Canaan. The Amorite god of war was Amurru. A pillar was set up to represent this god, usually at a cave. A limestone altar was made without pollution by any tool. Among the Hebrews we find similar directions for a stone altar in Exodus 20:25: "And if you make me an altar of stone, you shall not build it of hewn stones; for if you wield your tool upon it you profane it."

In 1759 B.C. Mari was turned into ruins by Babylonian troops.

### *The Hammurabi Code of Laws*

Hammurabi, the famous ruler of the Amorites or Babylonians, who lived about 1728-1686 B.C., was both a great conqueror and a lawgiver. He is remembered especially because of his laws carved on a black stone monument or stele discovered in 1901 and now in the Louvre, Paris. Many of these laws reveal the influence of the early Sumerian laws. The laws are written in the cuneiform script of the Sumerians, using wedge-shaped characters. Hammurabi is shown receiving

<sup>7</sup>This ziggurat may be the tower referred to in the biblical explanation of the different languages of people (Genesis 11:1-9). It speaks of "a tower with its top in the heavens" and implies the greatness of a ziggurat on a flat plain.

these laws (three hundred of them) from his god Shamash. This beautiful black diorite stele was set up in the high temple of Marduk in the city of Babylon. Later on we find some of the same laws in the Old Testament (Exodus 21-23). A comparison of Hammurabi's laws with those of the Old Testament reveals that justice is rendered according to the principle of "an eye for an eye" by both peoples. Note the following laws of Hammurabi:

14. If a man steals the son of a man who is a minor, he shall be put to death.
15. If a man shall cut down a tree in a man's orchard without the consent of the owner, he shall pay one-half mana of silver. [These were date orchards.]
195. If a son strikes his father, they shall cut off his hand.
200. If a man knocks out the tooth of a man of his own rank, they shall knock his tooth out.
233. If a builder builds a house for a man and does not make his work strong and a wall falls, that builder shall strengthen that wall at his own expense.

As Hammurabi was said to have received his code from Shamash, so we read that the Hebrew code was given to Moses by Yahweh. Note their similarity to those of the Hammurabi code:

Whoever strikes a man so that he dies shall be put to death (Exodus 21:12).

Whoever strikes his father or his mother shall be put to death (Exodus 21:15).

If any harm follows, then you shall give life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, stripe for stripe (Exodus 21:23-25).

If you meet your enemy's ox or his ass going astray, you shall bring it back to him. If you see the ass of one who hates you lying under its burden, you shall refrain from leaving him with it, you shall help him to lift it up (Exodus 23:4, 5).

### *Aramaean*

Many small states in Syria and Palestine came under an Aramaean power between 1150 and 1000 B.C. Important ones were Damascus, Hamath, Zobah, Edom, and Moab. The first three were in Syria, and their people are often called Syrians. Because of the commercial interests of the Aramaeans their language spread and gradually replaced that of the Accadian.

In the time of the Assyrian and Persian Empires, Aramaic was used as the official language of their western provinces (cf. Isaiah 36:11). After the exile, the Jews came to speak Aramaic in ordinary affairs in place of Hebrew. It seems to have been the language of Jesus.

Aramaic continued to be the language of the peoples of the Near East until the Arab invasions in the seventh century A.D.

## 3

# *Flood Stories*

GREAT DISASTERS LIKE FLOODS AND EARTHQUAKES have always been difficult for people to understand. Today we are learning more and more about their causes, and as we learn more we cease to say that God sends them to punish us. It seems doubtful that God deliberately plans evil or harmful events. Nevertheless, when floods occurred in antiquity, they appeared to the people to be the punishment of their gods. Perhaps in the flat Tigris-Euphrates Valley there was some great flood caused by torrents of rain and the overflowing of the rivers. Possibly an earthquake caused a tidal wave to sweep over the land from the Persian Gulf. In the Sumerian and Babylonian flood stories the holocaust was said to be directed by the gods.

### *Great Epics of the Babylonians*

Of enormous interest has been the discovery of the old Babylonian *Epic of Creation* and the *Epic of Gilgamesh* (about 2100 B.C.). In the latter, we find a story of the Deluge and of a Babylonian Noah.

The *Epic of Creation* tells of the conflict between the good sun god, Marduk, and the evil goddess of chaos, Tiamat. Out of a watery chaos came Apsu and Tiamat, from whom numerous other gods descended. The greatest of these were Anu, Ea (or Enlil), and Marduk (or Bel). Tiamat was a fearful monster, which Marduk strangled in a net and split in half like a shell-

fish, making one part the sky above and the other the flat earth below on which man lives.

It was at Nineveh in A.D. 1853 that English excavators stumbled upon the palace and library of Asshurbanapal, king of Assyria (669-626 B.C.). Among thousands of tablets was found an ancient version of the flood story in a long poem on twelve tablets — *The Epic of Gilgamesh*. This story bears very close resemblance to the one in Genesis 6 — 9. Scholars have found that this story is related to the earlier Sumerian account found in A.D. 1889-1900 on clay tablets at Nippur.

The *Epic of Gilgamesh*, ruler of Erech (or Uruk), tells that he and his friend, the warrior Enkidu, are on a journey in a sacred forest. Gilgamesh and Enkidu slay a monster. Ishtar, goddess of Erech, is spurned by the ruler Gilgamesh and she therefore causes the death of his friend Enkidu. Grief leads Gilgamesh to seek his companion in the underworld, where he meets Uta-naphishtum, the immortal. Gilgamesh seeks to know the answers about life after death. On his way, Ishtar tells him:

O Gilgamesh, whither wilt thou go?  
 The life thou seekest thou shalt not find.  
 When the gods created mankind,  
 Death they prepared for man,  
 But life they retained in their hands.  
 Fill thou, O Gilgamesh, thy belly.  
 Be merry day and night.  
 Every day prepare joyfulness.  
 Day and night dance and make music.  
 Let thy garments be made clean.  
 Let thy head be washed, and be thou bathed in water.  
 Give heed to the little one that takes hold of thy hand.  
 Let a wife rejoice in thy bosom.  
 For this is the mission of man.<sup>1</sup>

Gilgamesh reached Uta-naphishtum and obtained a plant of life, but a serpent stole it from him, causing his search for immortality to end in failure.

Then Uta-naphishtum explained to him how he gained immortality in the flood. He related how the gods decided to send the deluge upon a city on the banks of the Euphrates River. But the god Ea revealed these terrible plans to Uta-naphishtum, and gave him directions for building a ship of seven

<sup>1</sup> Finegan, *op. cit.*, p. 28.

stories, each with nine rooms. Uta-naphishtum brought all of his family and his relatives together with all kinds of living things to this ship. Here they waited during a storm that was so terrible that even the gods crouched in fear and wept. At the end of the flood, the boat was grounded on Mount Nisir (east of Mosul and the Tigris River). Gilgamesh listened to this vivid story as Uta-naphishtum told how:

Six days and six nights  
Raged the wind, the Deluge, the hurricane devastated the land.

When the seventh day arrived . . .

The sea became calm . . . the Deluge ceased.

I looked upon the sea and the sound of voices had ended.

And all mankind had turned to clay.

.....  
I opened a window and the light fell on my cheek.

I kneeled and sat down to weep,

Tears streaming on my cheeks.

I looked on the quarters of the billowing sea.

.....  
The boat touched upon Mount Nisir.

Mount Nisir held it fast and allowed it not to move.<sup>2</sup>

Then on the seventh day, Uta-naphishtum sent out a dove which soon returned. This indicated that there was no dry land. A swallow also returned. Finally a raven flew out but did not return. At this signal Uta-naphishtum offered sacrifices to the gods. As the gods smelled the fragrance of these offerings they gathered around him eagerly.

Ea then persuaded the gods to save this righteous man. Enlil relented, and led Uta-naphishtum and his wife from the boat, and blessed them.

Formerly Ut-Napistim was a man,

But now Ut-Napistim and his wife shall be like the gods, even us.

Ut-Napistim shall dwell far away at the mouth of the rivers.<sup>3</sup>

### *The Hebrew Flood Story*

In Genesis 6 — 8, the story of the flood resembles the ancient one of Babylonia. The latter involves numerous gods. In the Hebrew story it is Yahweh who despaired of people because of their wickedness and who decided to send a flood to destroy

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 29-30.

<sup>3</sup> Stephen H. Langdon, *Semitic Mythology*, pp. 210-223.

them. Yahweh selected Noah and his family as the best people to be saved.

Noah was given full directions by Yahweh to make a box-like boat about four hundred and fifty feet long, seventy-five feet wide, and forty feet high. This boat was to be built like the Babylonian houses and to be watertight. After it was finished, Noah was directed to take seven pairs of every kind of animal and bird that were acceptable to the Hebrews and one pair of the others, together with all the members of his family, into the ark.

Then the rain poured down for forty days and forty nights until all living things on the land were destroyed. At the end of the forty days Noah sent forth a dove, but it returned. He waited seven days longer and once again sent out the dove. This time the dove came back with an olive branch. Then he sent forth the dove a third time and it did not return. By this Noah knew that the waters had gone down. He came forth from the ark and made a great sacrifice of many animals to the god Yahweh. The record says: "And when the Lord smelled the pleasing odor, the Lord said in his heart, 'I will never again curse the ground because of man . . . neither will I ever again destroy every living creature as I have done'" (Genesis 8:21).

How does it happen that the Bible flood story is so similar to the Babylonian and Sumerian flood stories? Since the Hebrew tribes moved about in the river valleys, it is probable that some of them first heard the story in Mesopotamia. It is even more possible that they heard it in Canaan, because the *Gilgamesh Epic* was well known in Canaan long before the arrival of the Hebrews. It has been discovered on the clay tablets at Megiddo.

The Uta-naphishtum of the Babylonian story, according to one reckoning, was tenth of a line of pre-flood kings. He resembled the Noah of Genesis, who was tenth of a line of pre-flood patriarchs. The Babylonian and biblical stories give similar plans for making an ark. The stories agree as to the launching of the ark, the sending out of birds, the resting of the ark on Mt. Ararat (in modern Armenia), the end of the flood, the sacrifice, and the promise that there shall never again be such a deluge.

The startling differences between the Babylonian and bibli-

cal accounts are in their conceptions of deity. The former has numerous gods who disagree; they crouch in fear of the storm; and when it is over they swarm "like flies" over the sacrifice. In the biblical story the deity is master of all. The Hebrew story shows evidence of much screening and reinterpretation of the old Babylonian story by those who wrote centuries later.

Scholars find in the biblical account of the flood a skillful combination of a Yahwist (J) story (written about 950-850 B.C.) and a later account by the Priestly (P) writer (written about 500-450 B.C.). Differences in these accounts may be noted by reading them separately.

*J Account*

Genesis 6:5-8  
7:1-5, 7-10, 12, 16b  
7:17b, 22-23  
8:2b-3a, 6-12  
8:13b, 20-22

*P Account*

Genesis 6:9-22  
7:6, 11, 13-16a  
7:17a, 18-21, 24  
8:1-2a, 3b-5  
8:13a, 14-19  
9:1-17

The most notable difference between the two accounts is in the duration of the flood. The Yahwist (J) account states that after Noah had been in the ark seven days (Genesis 7:4), rain fell for forty days and nights (7:4,12), and then the ground became dry after two weeks (8:6,10,12), a total of sixty-one days. According to the Priestly (P) account the great subterranean waters and the waters from the heavens were unleashed for 150 days. According to this account, Noah could not leave the ark until one year and eleven days after he entered it, apparently because of the length of time needed for the drying process (7:11; 8:13a, 14).

In the biblical story we find that God was grieved to his heart (see Genesis 6:5-6) by man's evil ways. God was delighted, however, to find one "righteous man, blameless in his generation" (6:9). God had given man freedom of will and choice to do or not do the will of God. God prefers it that way, even though man makes the wrong choice too often. The rainbow is given as a sign of God's protection of man.

### *Modern Man and Floods*

People have not always understood the orderly ways of the universe. They have often believed that great disasters such as

floods were sent by the gods to punish them. Even today there are some people who believe that God sends all disasters. Engineers tell us that we have enough knowledge today to stop floods in America if people would work together to use it. Scientists are showing us more and more about how to work in harmony with the laws of the universe. Teachers of religion are teaching us how to work together to obey these laws so as to help God to care for his people. Many men and women, however, believe that God depends upon his people to overcome difficulties, to discover the laws of his universe, and to learn to use these laws. When man loves his neighbors enough to use the laws of the universe to help them, many disasters may be averted. Perhaps that is what some Americans are just beginning to realize when they plant trees and build dams to care for flood waters.

Jesus said that God sends rain "on the just and on the unjust" alike. Perhaps the people who explain floods as an act of punishment by God are mistaken. Both good and bad people may suffer from floods unless they learn the causes of them and work together to prevent them. This will mean that people who do not live in flood sections of the country may need to help those who do live in such areas to change the conditions that bring about such disasters.

## 4

*Ancient Writings  
Our Textbooks  
of the Past*

ONE OF THE GREATEST DISCOVERIES of ancient times was the art of writing. No other single invention made by early people has helped more to make our life what it is today.

#### *Picture Writing*

In the first kinds of writing, objects were referred to by making pictures of them. Then words were made by groups of little pictures. For example, to write the word "day," a circle was drawn. This circle was the sun. A moon and a star were used to write the word "night." In Egypt there have been found a great many picture writings. The Mesopotamians and Egyptians were probably among the first peoples to write down their ideas. Some people think that the writing of the Egyptians is the prettiest that has ever been known. It is called "hieroglyphic," which means literally "sacred carving."

The Egyptians were also the first people to make paper, or papyrus, and they used it long before other people had learned that it had a practical use. Of course, we would think their books were very clumsy if we compared them with our modern books.

To make a book or roll in Egypt it was necessary to gather stems of a reed called the papyrus, which grew in marshy places. This plant sometimes grew to a height of fifteen feet and had a stalk which could be as much as six inches thick. After the outer covering of the stalk was removed, the inner part was

separated into thin layers. These layers were laid side by side and a thin gum was spread over them. Then another layer was prepared in the same way and laid crosswise on the top of the first. This double sheet was pressed on a table and dried.

Sheets of paper were not bound like a modern book but joined end to end as they were needed for writing. As the writing proceeded, the scroll was rolled up until it formed a big roll, sometimes many feet long. One of them in the British Museum measures 135 feet in length. The Egyptians made ink by thickening water with a vegetable gum and adding soot to it. A pointed reed was used for a pen.

Many papyrus rolls were written to be placed in the tombs of the dead. Some of these are very beautiful, illustrated as they are with delightful pictures in color to represent scenes of life in another world. It is from these writings that we have learned much about Egyptian life and religion. Scholars have discovered that the Egyptians were beginning to form some noble thoughts about religion. These ancient writings and pictures have taught us how much we owe to people of the distant past.

Writings that were to last a very long time were written or cut into stones. The stories of many of the Pharaohs (or kings) were carved deep and clear in the hard granite of a great obelisk, or in the limestone of a temple wall. The lines cut in the stone were filled in with different colored pastes so that the walls looked as if they were covered with finely-colored tapestries. After thousands of years much of the color has disappeared. However, there are some temples and tombs where the color is almost as brilliant as when it was laid on so many thousands of years ago.

### *Clay Tablets*

The Sumerians and Babylonians took great pains to write down poems, proverbs, folk stories, the deeds of their great men, and the adventures of their heroes. They developed a kind of writing called cuneiform. It was probably over five thousand years ago that they learned to write by this method. A lump of soft clay was molded into a tablet a few inches square. The writing was done with a sharp-pointed instrument called a stylus, which was used to press little V-shaped marks into the clay while it was still wet. These V-shaped marks, or

wedges, were used to make words. Then the tablet was baked in the sun.

Vast numbers of these clay tablets were stored in the libraries of these ancient countries, and thousands of the tablets have been dug up in recent times. They help us to learn about great prehistoric civilizations that are not described in the Bible.

### *Languages in Palestine*

In Canaan Semitic names, written nearly two thousand years before Jesus' time, have been found. There were names of such ancient towns as Bethshemesh (House of the Sun), Beth-yerah

PROBABLE EGYPTIAN ORIGINAL	SINAITIC	CANAANITE-PHoeniCian	EARLY GREEK	LATER GREEK	LATIN	ENGLISH
𓁑	𓁑 𓁑	𓁑 𓁑	A	A	A	A
□ □	□ □ □	𠁥 𠁥	S Ȑ	B	B	B
	𠁥 𠁥	1	1	Γ	CG	C,G
𠁥 𠁥	𠁥 𠁥	Δ	Δ	Δ	D	D
	𠁥 𠁥	𠁥 𠁥	𠁥 𠁥	𠁥 𠁥	E	E
—o	Y	Y	Y	Y	F V	F,U,V, W,Y
= (?)	= =	工	工			Z
𠁥 𠁥	𠁥 𠁥	𠁥 𠁥	𠁥 𠁥	𠁥 𠁥	H	H
	⊗	⊗	⊗	⊗		(Th)
𠁥 𠁥	𠁥 𠁥	𠁥 𠁥	𠁥 𠁥	𠁥 𠁥	I	I,J
+	𠁥 𠁥	𠁥 𠁥	𠁥 𠁥	𠁥 𠁥		K
𠁥 𠁥	𠁥 𠁥	𠁥 𠁥	𠁥 𠁥	𠁥 𠁥	L	L
~~~~~	~	~	~	~	M	M
	~	~	~	~	N	N
⇒ ⇒	𠁥 𠁥	𠁥 𠁥	𠁥 𠁥	𠁥 𠁥	X	(X)
eye	o o	o o	o o	o o	O	O
—	𠁥 𠁥	𠁥 𠁥	𠁥 𠁥	𠁥 𠁥	P	P
𠁥 𠁥	𠁥 𠁥	𠁥 𠁥	𠁥 𠁥	𠁥 𠁥	(S)	(S)
𠁥 𠁥	𠁥 𠁥	𠁥 𠁥	𠁥 𠁥	𠁥 𠁥	Q	Q
𠁥	𠁥 𠁥	𠁥 𠁥	𠁥 𠁥	𠁥 𠁥	R	R
~	~	~	~	~	S	S
+	X	T	T	T	T	T

(House of the Moon), Beth-horon, Bethel, and Bethlehem. As the languages changed, the names were pronounced somewhat differently. Bethlehem, however, has retained almost its original pronunciation for thousands of years. In the course of time, however, the meaning of the word Bethlehem has changed. It means "Temple of the God Lakhmu" in Canaanite, "House of Bread" in Hebrew and Aramaic, and today, "House of Flesh" in Arabic.

Canaan was invaded many times. For a time it was under Egyptian rule, which must have been oppressive. Great advances were made in writing. One scholar says that the inhabitants of Canaan were familiar with five forms of writing: Accadian, a cuneiform type from the area of Mesopotamia; Egyptian hieroglyphs; an alphabet from which our own developed; the cuneiform alphabet of Ugarit; and a script of Byblos.

### *Recent Discoveries of Writing*

Fortunately many clay tablets of the Accadian writing (15th and 14th centuries B.C.) have been discovered in Palestine. These tablets are hard, like stone, and well preserved. They include letters and business documents.

A marvelous discovery of writing was found in 1887 at Tell el-Amarna, once the capital of the great ruler Akhenaton of Egypt. These Amarna tablets are letters, nearly all of which were written in Canaan to the Egyptian court; they help us to know a great deal about Egyptian rule and life in Canaan before the Hebrew conquest of that land.

Another discovery of writing which is of great value in helping us to understand the early world of the Hebrews was made between 1929 and 1939 at Ugarit. This city lay at the cross-roads for Aegean peoples. Several hundred clay tablets and fragments were found at Ugarit (Old Ras Shamrah) on the coast of northern Syria. On them were a cuneiform alphabet and a language closely related to the beginnings of the Hebrew language, which finally came to be used to write the Old Testament. When these valuable tablets were studied and read, it was seen that they contained several great epics of the Canaanites relating to the gods Baal, Anath, and others. There were hymns and myths, rituals and temple observances. Here were found many parallels to Old Testament poetry and style. Be-

cause of these writings we can better understand the religion of Canaan, as well as endless references in Hebrew poetry.

In 1933-39, the great mass of tablets excavated at Mari on the middle Euphrates River (see p. 33) revealed much about the religion of Syria and Mesopotamia eighteen hundred years before the birth of Christ.

### *The Discovery of the Alphabet*

Many kinds of writing were on trial and many attempts were made to construct alphabets. From alphabets grew Hebrew, Syriac, Arabic, Greek, Latin, and many other languages. The Hebrews based their language upon a highly developed form of writing found in Canaan.

The alphabet is one of the most valuable contributions made by the people of Syria and Palestine to the world. Someone invented a system of writing to represent various sounds of the human voice. Only the consonants were employed at first, and the vowels were added later. The resulting alphabet replaced the thousands of pictures and characters which had been used in Egypt and in Sumer and gave books to the world which changed all of history.

### *Early Hebrew Writing*

Some very ancient Canaanite writing has been found in the region of Sinai. These characters look somewhat like Egyptian hieroglyphs. After years of study, it is found that they reveal the beginnings of the Hebrew language and that, before the alphabet was devised, the people used simple pictures of objects. Some of this very ancient Canaanite writing seems to have been done between 1800 B.C. and 1500 B.C. A few bits of the same writing were found at Gezer, Lachish, and Shechem in Palestine. By 1000 B.C., it appears that the Hebrew of the Old Testament was being formed or perhaps was fully developed. With this written language it was possible for the Bible to begin to take form.

From these sources as well as from numerous inscriptions on stones and pieces of pottery, scholars have learned much about the early biblical world, its religions and gods, its myths, and its language. They can understand how the languages grew, including the Hebrew in which the Old Testament was written.

This understanding sheds much light on how to translate our Bible with more accuracy.

There are many references in the Old Testament to letters that were written and sent (see 2 Samuel 11:14). Yet no such correspondence was ever found until in 1935 Leslie Starkey, a British archaeologist, made a discovery of a dozen letters at Lachish (the modern Tell ed-Duweir) written in biblical Hebrew. They were written on pieces of clay. These letters were written at the time of the conquest of Judah under Nebuchadnezzar. In 1938 more letters were found at Lachish, providing perhaps as many as 100 lines of Hebrew writing from the time of the prophet Jeremiah, some 2500 years ago.

### *Hebrew Writing on Scrolls*

There are references in the Old Testament to Hebrew papyrus scrolls. Writing on a scroll is mentioned in Jeremiah 36: 8, 28. Baruch says of Jeremiah, "He dictated all these words to me, while I wrote them with ink on the scroll" (Jeremiah 36: 18). A pen seems to have been used (Psalm 45:1). The pen was probably a sharpened reed. The writing on the long scroll was done in columns (cf. Jeremiah 36:23) separated by the space of a thumb or two fingers with margins at the top and bottom of two to four fingers in width.

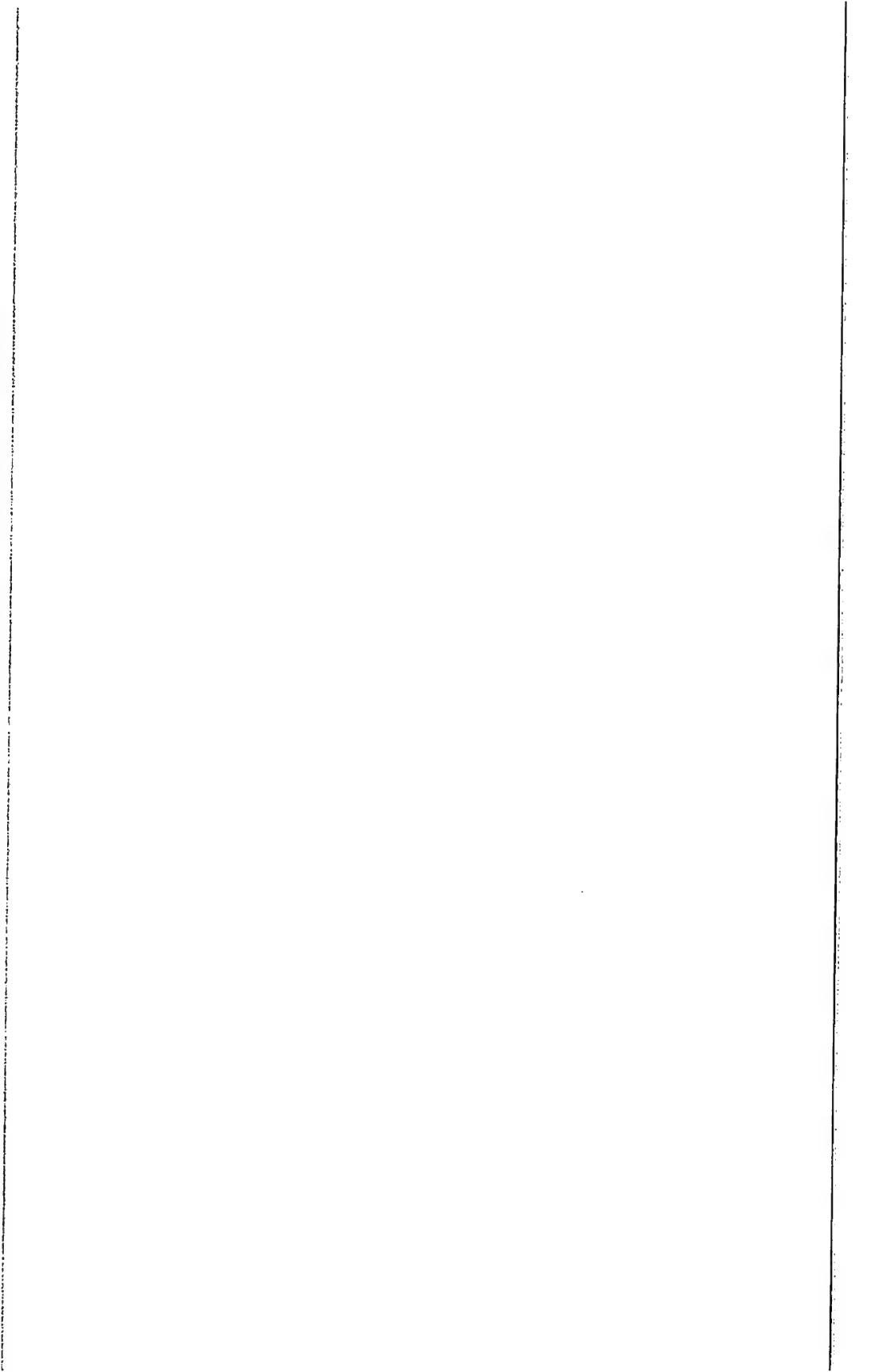
In later times the Hebrews, like other people, used parchment or vellum. Parchment was made by soaking sheepskin or goatskin so that the hair could be pulled out. The skin was stretched on a frame and dried. It was then scraped with a stone and rubbed until smooth. Finally, it was rolled into a scroll. Precious writings could be better preserved when they were placed upon these parchment scrolls. In fact some of them which have been found near the Dead Sea have lasted for about two thousand years.

### *Aramaic*

Cyrus, ruler of Persia and Media, conquered in 539 B.C. the land of Babylonia where the exiles from Judah had lived since 586 B.C. The Persians used the Aramaic language and made it the official language of the Persian Empire. Of course the Jews learned it and, when some of these exiles were allowed to return to their home land in 536 B.C. during the rule of Cyrus,

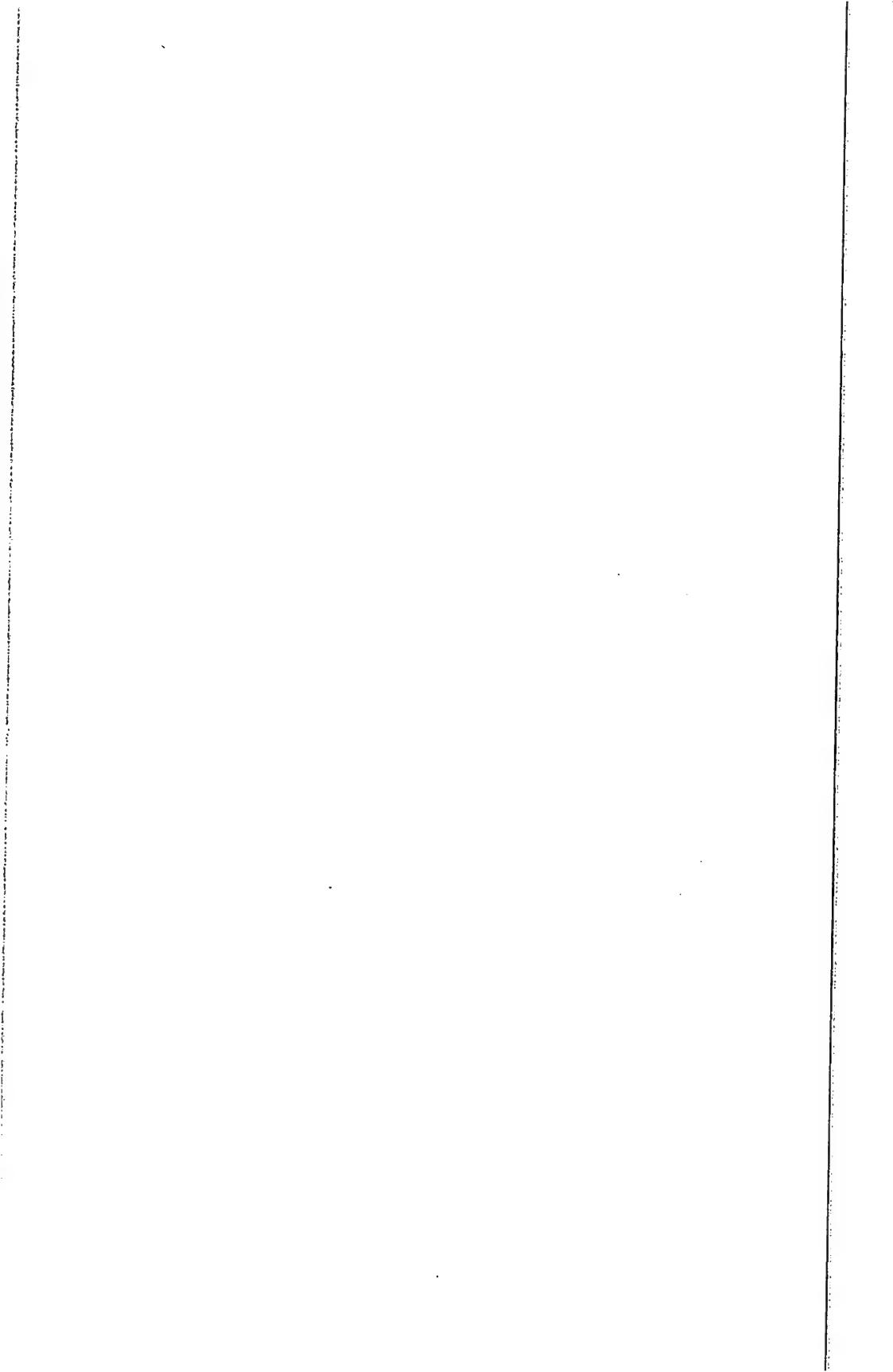
they brought along the Aramaic language which later was spoken by Jesus and the Jews of his time.

It is not surprising, therefore, to find that some of the last books of the Old Testament were written not in Hebrew but in Aramaic. Probably the Book of Nehemiah was the latest of the books to be written entirely in Hebrew. Ezra and Daniel were among the books written partly in the Aramaic language.



## *II*

# *Egypt and the Hebrews*



# 5

## *Egyptian Civilization*

WHILE THE HEBREW TRIBES WERE LIVING as nomads or wanderers in and around the Arabian desert, their neighbors in Egypt were doing many thrilling things. For thousands of years the Egyptians had lived along the river Nile, where they built enormous temples and pyramids. Here they were discovering many wonderful things about the world and about religion.

We continue to learn much about this marvelous civilization in ancient Egypt. Archaeologists are discovering treasures of art that were hidden in Egyptian tombs for ages. On the pyramids, temples, and tombs scholars are reading curious picture writing and are learning about customs and religions of that civilization of the distant past. In this way we are finding how some of the Hebrews might have been influenced by the Egyptians. This is why we need to know about the culture of Egypt.

### *The Land of Egypt*

Egypt has a very old and wonderful history. Thousands of years before the New World was discovered, or even before our ancestors were civilized, the Egyptians were living in an advanced society. The climate was pleasant, with many bright, sunny days which caused people to wear clothing to protect them from the heat rather than from the cold. From flax the Egyptians learned to make linen of marvelous fineness.

Because Egypt was a land where it was easy to make a living the people had time to discover how to do many extra things.

They measured time and devised a calendar. They were the first people to understand surveying. Because the Nile River passed through the center of the country, they made boats. After a time they grew skillful enough to make boats that could travel on the seas; and such long-distance travel helped to spread ideas.

### *The Builders of the Pyramids*

While the Accadian Empire was growing in Mesopotamia, the enormous pyramids of Egypt were already towering above the desert near the Nile River. They were over a thousand years old when Abraham was born. The first king of the Old Kingdom or Pyramid Age (c. 2700—c. 2200 B.C.) was Djoser I. His chief minister was Imhotep. Their memory lives on in the ruins we can still visit at Saqqarah (near the old capital, Memphis), of the terraced step pyramid. It rises 190 feet above the sands around it and is the oldest pyramid (about 2700 B.C.) in Egypt. Near it had already been built a beautiful mortuary temple of hewn stones. This step pyramid was a house of eternity and it represented a stairway to heaven.

The largest pyramid was built later at Gizeh by Khufu (Cheops), a ruler of the Fourth Dynasty, about 2660 B.C. Over a square covering thirteen acres, 2,300,000 blocks of limestone, each weighing on the average two and one-half tons, were skillfully piled into a pyramid 481 feet high. It required ten years to build a road upon which to drag the giant stones and twenty years to build the pyramid itself. Herodotus, an ancient historian, tells us that laborers toiled in groups of 100,000 men for three-month periods in its building, although another reporter sets the number of workmen much lower.

Khafre (Chephren), the successor of Khufu, constructed the second great pyramid at Gizeh 447½ feet in height. Nearby Khafre also built the Sphinx with a head representing his own and the body of a couchant lion. Khafre wears on his head his regal headdress and has a deadly cobra on his forehead (the uraeus) to show his power to destroy his enemies. The Sphinx was carved out of a natural rock and built up with blocks of stone.

How much the Egyptians revered the sun god is shown by these tombs which were built for their kings. Some of the

rulers spent a large part of their lives and an enormous amount of money to build tombs to preserve their own bodies after death. These massive pyramid tombs were placed high above the earth to greet the sun god. The top of the pyramid was the first object in the area to receive the rays of the sun, which glittered on its polished peak and sides.

A door in the pyramid led to a temple where it was supposed that the spirit of the dead king could come forth to receive and enjoy offerings which were prepared by the priests for him. These offerings were of many kinds and were very rich. It was thought that the things which had been used by the dead king in his lifetime were also necessary to keep him alive in the afterworld. Therefore, offerings of food, drink, clothing, ointment, perfume, and incense were made by the priests for their departed ruler.

When the priest presented these offerings to the spirit of the king or the Pharaoh, he entered the mysterious chamber behind the court of the temple and stood before the great door leading into the pyramid. Standing here, the priest spoke to the king as if he were alive and presented to him a rich collection of gifts. After each gift he repeated special words, and at the close of the offering said, "Given to thee are all offerings, all oblations, even thy desire, and that by which it is well for thee with the god forever." Finally the priest performed some charms to keep away hunger from the Pharaoh. Sometimes he gave recitations for the Pharaoh's pleasure.

Altogether, eighty or ninety pyramids have been found in Egypt. They were built on the nearby desert so as to spare the fertile land that was so greatly needed for crops. At all times, these tombs were places of repose for the dead as well as for the living. The surviving family and friends could come to the pyramids on certain festivals to make their offerings and eat their ceremonial meals. The tomb proper was underground, and the upper level was used for the ceremonials.

### *The King in the Sky*

There seems to have been the idea that the king not only lived in the pyramid tomb but also in a heavenly place for the dead in the sky. Some of the messages on the walls of the old pyramids have given us many interesting facts about the Egyp-

tians and their religion. Sometimes we find that the dead king was considered to be one of the stars. Other writings describe him as living with the sun god, or even becoming the sun god himself. On one pyramid there is a record of the king bathing with the sun god and being served by less important gods. It is not surprising that people who beheld the stars in the splendor of the Egyptian cloudless blue heavens thought they were looking at their departed ones passing across the sky. In later times the king was regarded as the earthly son and representative of the sun god, Ra. So quite naturally it was believed that, after his death, the king went to join his father in the sky.

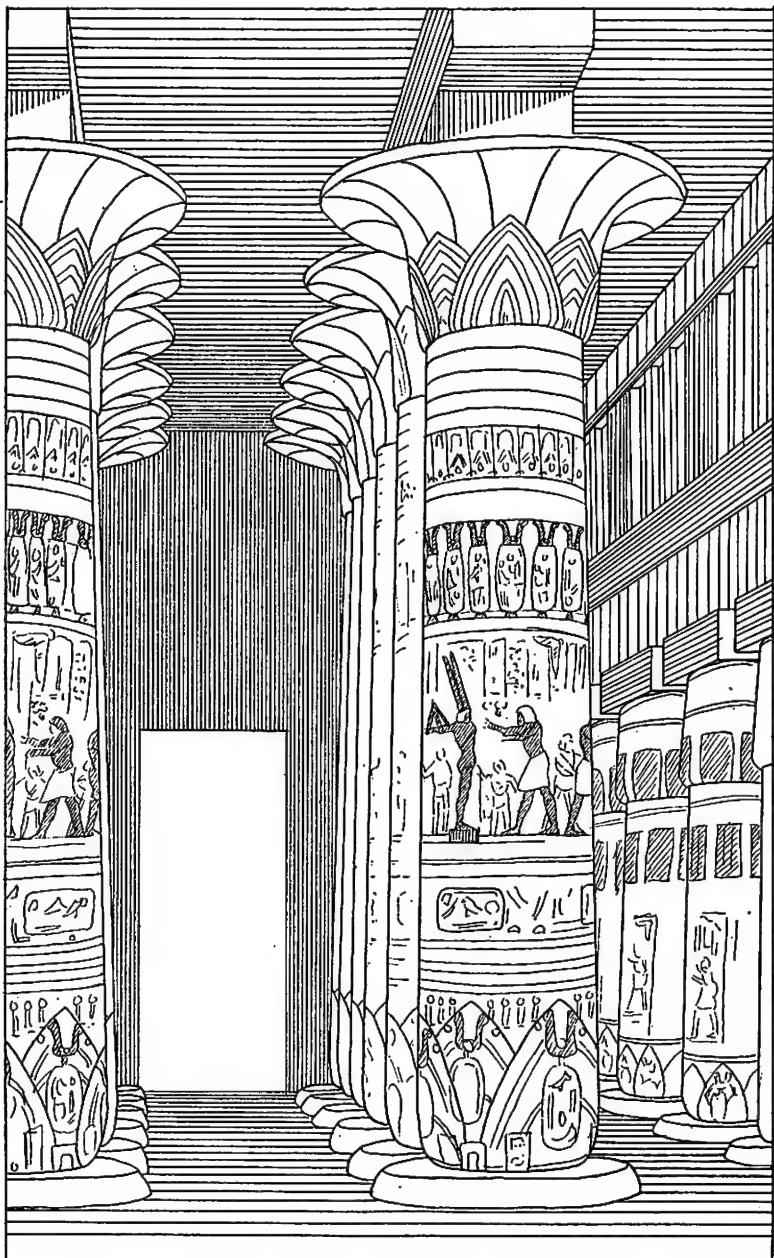
Before the king could ascend to the sky to live with the sun god Ra, it was thought that it was necessary for him to perform certain ceremonies to purify himself. One way in which he could purify himself was by water. Sometimes offerings of water were poured out to the gods; at other times the king bathed in a sacred lake, where the gods were said to provide him with towels, and sacred garments to wear. This method of preparing oneself for the gods is a very old oriental ceremony.

Religious people have kept for thousands of years the custom of using water for purification. In our churches we use water for baptism. Many people are immersed or baptized with water in their churches to signify a changed life and a commitment to Christ. Many Christians have their children sprinkled with holy water by a priest in order to have them saved and find favor with God. In other churches parents have their babies sprinkled as a sign that the parents themselves are making promises to God that they will help the children to become his worthy followers. Thus water is used in a number of ways as a symbol of purity.

In Egypt, after the baptism or purification by water, it was believed that the king flew like a bird to the sky and thence was ferried across to the sun god. You may read some of the things which were written thousands of years ago on one of the old pyramids:

This king Pepi flies away from you, ye mortals. He is not of the earth, he is of the sky. . . . This king Pepi flies as a cloud to the sky like a falcon, this king Pepi reaches the sky like the Horizon-god (Harakhte).

As the king arrives in the presence of the gods, they question him sharply, and finally he is received to be with them.



*The Gods of Egypt*

Like other early people, the Egyptians did not know the natural reasons for the change of seasons and other processes in nature. They supposed that there were special gods who managed each object or process. They worshiped the Nile god, Osiris, because his great river gave them water for their crops. They worshiped the sun god Ra, because it was thought that crops depended upon his kindness.

The sun god Ra was considered one of the most powerful of the gods. People in many other countries have also worshiped a god who looked after the sun. We think that our own ancestors must have worshiped the sun, because the first day of our week is named Sunday.

The Egyptians imagined several things about the sun god Ra. Some pictured him in human form ferrying across the heavenly blue ocean (the sky) in a double-reed boat, with the stars as his sailors. In many parts of Egypt the sun was thought to be a hawk which flew across the sky each day, and so their symbol for this god was a sun disk with the outspread wings of a great bird or falcon.

It was said that the enemies of the sun were the rain, the storm, and the clouds. In an ancient temple we find that people were thinking that the sun god caused life and growth. They said, "Thou hast driven away the cloud, and hast expelled the rain, and hast broken up the clouds."

In the Bible, we find descriptions of Yahweh that are like those used for the sun god of Egypt. Expressions like "the wings of the morning" (Psalm 139:9) and "the sun of righteousness . . . with healing in his wings" (Malachi 4:2) seem to parallel some of the Egyptian symbols for Ra.

Gradually the Egyptians began to regard their sun god as the chief of the gods. The Egyptians said that he was a god who was interested in people, and no longer a god of nature. In their thinking, they identified Ra with Ptah, the local god of Memphis. Eventually Ra and Ptah were merged with Amun, chief god of Thebes. It was believed that Ptah created other gods and helped in the affairs of people.

## 6

*Nobler Religion  
in  
Egypt*

SLOWLY SOME OF THE EGYPTIANS changed their ideas of the gods. Instead of their being merely gods of nature they became gods who assisted man in becoming a better person. Some of the teachings reportedly given by Egyptian gods are much older than the teachings of the great Hebrew prophets, yet at times they seem to be similar. Here are some:

Exalt not the son of an important man above an humble one, but take for thyself a man because of his ability.

If thou speakest the truth . . . in thy house, the nobles who are over the land will fear thee.

*“More acceptable is the virtue of the upright man than the ox [made as an offering] of him that doeth iniquity.”*

Do righteousness that thou mayest be established on earth. Comfort the mourner, afflict not the widow, deprive not a man of the possessions of his father. . . . Be not harsh, kindness is seemly.”<sup>1</sup>

On the doorpost of the tomb of Ameni, a government leader, we find words that may have been addressed to the sun god.

There was no citizen’s daughter whom I misused, there was no widow whom I afflicted, there was no peasant whom I evicted, there was no herdsman whom I expelled. . . . There was none wretched in my community, there was none hungry in my time. When years of famine came, I ploughed all the fields of the Oryx barony (his estate) . . . preserving its people alive, furnishing its food so that there was none hungry therein. I gave to the widow as to her who had a husband.

<sup>1</sup> James H. Breasted, *The Dawn of Conscience* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1933), pp. 155, 156. Used by permission.

I did not exalt the great (man) above the small (man) in anything that I gave.<sup>2</sup>

This shows that they were beginning to feel that justice and goodness were important. The sun god had begun to require his followers to live the good life. "It is an abomination of the god . . . to show partiality."

Rulers must be just and right, it was taught, because these qualities are desired by Ra, the sun god. Ra says "Speak truth, do truth [goodness] for it is great, it is mighty, it is enduring."

On an old coffin were some noble words which were supposed to have been said by the sun god: "I have made *every man like his brother*, and I have forbidden that they do evil, (but) it was their hearts which undid that which I had said."<sup>3</sup> In the land of Egypt, nearly two thousand years before Jesus came, we find people thinking that all people were equal in the sight of God. Jesus carried this idea further when he placed emphasis upon the idea of God as the Father who loves everyone.

We find the sun god Ra growing more and more interested in living people. Gradually Osiris, the god of the Nile River and the god which gave life to growing things, took the former place of the sun god and became the judge of people after death. The realm of Osiris was under the earth and he became the king of the world of the dead. Just as plants revived and came to life, so it was supposed that the king became Osiris and rose from the dead as Osiris had done. Later it was thought that Osiris arose and was lifted to the sky. Thus, we find some confusion in the beliefs about Ra and Osiris.

### *The Reforms of Amenhotep IV (Akhenaton)*

Perhaps the most remarkable things that happened in the Egyptian religion were the teachings and reforms of the Egyptian King Amenhotep IV. During the reign of his father, there already had been written some noble ideas of God. In a sun hymn, Ra is said to be the guide over all peoples and all lands. No longer did the king believe that Ra was limited to the Egyptians. He seemed to be the god of all people, as witnessed by the hymn:

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 213-214.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 216, 219, 221.

Creator of all and giver of their sustenance. . . .  
Every land is in rejoicing  
At his rising every day, in order to praise him.\*

When Amenhotep IV (Akhenaton) succeeded his father and reigned as king (c. 1375-1358 B.C.), he began to make some drastic religious reforms. This king changed both the concept and the name of the sun god Ra to the concept of one cosmic god whose name was Aton. Simultaneously, he changed his own name to Akhenaton, other forms of which are Ikhennaton, Ikhnaton, Ikhnaten, and Akhnaton. This name means "Aton is satisfied," or "He who is beneficial to Aton." Not only did the sun god receive a new name, but Akhenaton used a new symbolism. Instead of the old symbols of pyramid or bird, the Pharaoh instituted the sun disk with many rays, each ray ending in a human hand. Moreover, he sent forth men to change the names of other gods on public buildings to the name of the one god Aton.

Akhenaton found that people in the ancient and wonderful capital of Thebes had so many memories of their old gods that he moved his capital down the river to a new city called Amarna, which he established to honor Aton, the one god of all people. Here he built a beautiful new palace and a new temple to honor Aton.

Unlike other Egyptian rulers, Akhenaton had little interest in military affairs or in conquest. He became one of the first great peacemakers. Because he claimed that Aton was the only god, he did not expect him to be a war god. Undoubtedly many of the nobles in Egypt did not like Akhenaton because he would not go out with armies, chariots, and horses to gain more land and conquer other countries for Egypt. But the nobler religion of this great king made him faithful to the ways of justice and goodness.

Akhenaton's ideas of his god, Aton, have become known to us from pieces of a royal hymn which were found in the cemetery at Amarna. It is said that the king composed these lines to Aton:

Thou risest beautifully, O living Aton, Lord of Eternity;  
Thou art glittering, beautiful, strong;  
Thy love is great and mighty,

\* *Ibid.*, p. 276.



Thy rays furnish vision to every one of thy creatures,  
 Thy glowing hue brings life to the hearts of men,  
 When thou has filled the Two Lands with thy love.

.....

Maker of every land,  
 Creator of that which is upon it:  
 Even men, all herds of cattle and the antelopes,  
 All trees that grow in the soil,  
 They live when thou dawnest for them,  
 Thou art the mother and the father of all that thou hast made.  
 As for their eyes, when thou dawnest,  
 They see by means of thee.  
 Thy rays illuminate the whole earth,  
 And every heart rejoices because of seeing thee,  
 When thou dawnest as their lord.

.....

Thou hast made the distant sky to rise therein,  
 In order to behold all that thou didst make,  
 While thou wast yet alone.

.....

All flowers live and what grows in the soil  
 Is made to grow because thou dawnest.<sup>5</sup>

This ancient hymn expresses the idea that one god brought

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 287-289.

forth all races of men and gave them different speech and different colored skin. It proclaims that Aton gives life continuously, providing light and heat for all his creatures. It compares him to a father and a mother in his kindness and love for all people everywhere.

Akhenaton's religion made him a gentle and kind father. A little statue, found at Amarna, shows the king seated, holding his little daughter, the princess, on his knee and kissing her just as any kind father might do today.

King Tut-ankh-amun became the son-in-law of Akhenaton when he married one of his daughters. His great tomb was discovered in recent times with all its treasures. A lovely chair which came from the palace at Amarna was found in Tut-ankh-amun's tomb. On this chair is a scene showing the king resting, while his pretty queen stands before him with a jar of perfume from which she is gently touching her husband's clothing to give it fragrance. Many kings had been stern and formal, but Akhenaton seems to have brought friendliness and love into the palace which he built at Amarna.

### *Hymns of Aton Remind Us of the Psalms*

Parts of some hymns giving praise to the god Aton have been preserved on the tombs of some of the friends of Akhenaton. Lines in these hymns remind us of Psalm 104 in our Bible.

#### *Aton Hymn*

How manifold are thy works!  
They are hidden before men  
O sole God, beside whom there  
is no other.  
Thou didst create the earth accord-  
ing to thy heart.

.....

Thou settest every man into his  
place,  
Thou suppliest their necessities,  
Every one has his food,  
And his days are reckoned.  
The tongues are divers in speech,  
Their forms likewise and their skins  
are distinguished,  
For thou makest different the  
strangers. . . .

#### *Psalm 104*

O Lord, how manifold are thy  
works!  
In wisdom hast thou made them  
all;  
The earth is full of thy riches.  
(Verse 24)

Thy rays nourish every garden;  
 When thou risest they live,  
 They grow by thee.  
 Thou makest the seasons  
 In order to make develop all  
 thou hast made.  
 Winter to bring them coolness,  
 And heat that they may taste  
 thee.\*

### *Importance of the Character of God*

It may have been hundreds of years after the time of Akhenaton before the Hebrews gave up their erroneous beliefs in many spirit gods and came to realize that there is but one God for all of life. The name of God is not as important as the truth which people have about him. The Egyptians in the time of King Akhenaton used the name Aton for the one God when he changed the names of the numerous gods on all the great temples and pyramids to Aton. Today these monuments still bear marks which show how he chipped off the other names. This drastic reform brought great opposition to Akhenaton. When this great king died, and his son-in-law Tut-ankh-amun, a weaker king, came to the throne, noblemen and priests began to destroy the work of Akhenaton and return to the worship of their old gods. Akhenaton's enemies took pleasure in destroying his teachings and closing the beautiful temple of Aton in Amarna.

### *The Influence of Akhenaton's Beliefs*

Even though much of the worship of Aton was destroyed, intelligent people now had learned nobler things about God and we find these ideas being sung to their old god Amun. A hymn to Amun reminds us of the hymn to Aton.

Lord of truth, father of gods,  
 Maker of men and creator of animals,  
 Lord of that which is.

Lord of sweetness, great in love,  
 At whose coming the people live.\*

\* *Ibid.*, pp. 284-285.

\* Breasted, *op. cit.*, pp. 310, 311.

Another hymn, addressed to Osiris, says that he is the father and mother of men. This was also a part of the Aton belief. Here is a prayer to Ra which shows that the Egyptians' ideas of God were continuing to grow and to become very noble:

Thou art the sole god, there is no other,  
Even Ra, who dawneth in the sky,  
.....  
Who heareth the prayers of him who calls to him,  
.....  
Who maketh the people and the birds to live,  
Who supplieth the needs of the mice in their holes,  
The worms and insects likewise.<sup>8</sup>

A poem of praise to Amun has been found in an old chapel at Thebes:

Thou, O Amon, art the lord of the silent,  
Who cometh at the cry of the poor.  
When I cry to thee in my affliction,  
Then thou comest and savest me.

.....  
When men cry unto thee,  
Thou art he that cometh from afar.<sup>9</sup>

About one thousand years before Jesus, and long before the Hebrews had come to the realization of one God of all people and a God of goodness, we find certain Egyptians teaching some noble ideas of their Amun-Ra god. Here is advice given by an official of Egypt to his son in those far-off days:

Be not greedy for a cubit of land,  
And trespass not on the boundary of the widow.

.....  
Plow the fields that thou mayest find thy needs,  
And receive thy bread from thine own threshing floor.  
Better is a bushel which God giveth to thee,  
Than five thousand gained by transgression.

.....  
Better is poverty in the hand of God  
Than riches in the storehouse;  
And better are loaves when the heart is joyous,  
Than riches in unhappiness.

.....  
Of what advantage are fine clothes,

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 313, 314.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 315.

When one is a transgressor before God?

.....  
Take not gifts from the strong,  
Neither shalt thou oppress for him the weak.  
Justice is a great gift of God,  
He giveth it to whom he will.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 322-324.

## 7

*While Hebrews  
Lived in Egypt*

ALREADY WE HAVE NOTICED that Hebrew tribes moved into the more fertile river valleys and into Canaan. We know very little about their first invasion into Egypt, but some legends of these early Hebrews were passed along from fathers to sons. Centuries later they were recorded in the Bible. It is those Hebrews who lived in Egypt that presumably became the chief source of the religion of Yahweh which they carried into Canaan to other Hebrews who were already settled there.

In some distant past (perhaps around 1720 B.C.) a few Hebrews had settled in Egypt. In the course of time, later Hebrews looked back upon the experiences of these Egyptian ancestors and traced their origins to Jacob.

*The Hyksos*

A vast conglomeration of warlike people known as Hyksos had descended upon Syria and Egypt in the early eighteenth century B.C. They came into Canaan from the north. There is evidence that they were there in the fifteenth century B.C., after having been in Egypt. They possessed skills in fashioning jewelry and in the use of bronze and perhaps introduced inlaid bone and ivory work. In their time pottery was of superior quality. They introduced the horse and the horsedrawn chariot for use in war. They built fortifications with walls and towers and with sloping ramparts of packed earth.

By 1730 B.C., the Hyksos dominated Egypt, making Avaris in

the Nile Delta their capital. Their dominion lasted a century and a half, until in 1580 B.C. there was a war of liberation from the Hyksos led by Ahmose I of Thebes. He pursued the Hyksos into Canaan, where they lived until the Egyptian ruler Thutmose III (about 1450 B.C.) dealt them a fatal blow in Syria.

### *Hebrews Settle in Egypt*

Scholars think that conditions were made favorable for a Hebrew tribe to go to Egypt to live during the Hyksos rule. Presumably the Hebrews lived around the Plain of Tanis or Zoan (cf. Psalm 78:12). The Nile River gave an unfailing supply of water which could be used by farmers to raise grain and vegetables. Since Egypt was such an attractive land to nomadic tribes, the Egyptians built the "Wall of Egypt" along the eastern side of the Nile Delta. Between this wall and the Nile River the land was less fertile and fewer Egyptians lived there. Doubtless this is the area where the Hebrew nomads were allowed to settle. They seem to have remained several hundred years from c. 1720 until after 1300 B.C. They could live in tents, and care for their flocks as they had always done.

The Hyksos allowed the Hebrews to live in peace, and the Hebrew customs and religion apparently changed but little from those of more ancient times. However, Egypt had an advanced civilization and by living near them the Hebrews could have learned much if they had been willing to do so.

### *The Story of Joseph*

One of the most delightful stories of the Hebrews is that of Joseph. It must have been retold for centuries before it was written down, because it is so polished and splendid. The story may be found in Genesis, beginning with Chapter 37. It seems to have been written in two forms between c. 950 B.C. and c. 750 B.C. by two different writers, J and E. The present biblical story blends these two stories. The Moffatt translation shows the differences between them.<sup>1</sup>

A Hebrew shepherd boy, Joseph, was sold by his jealous brothers to a passing caravan. Afterward, the guilty ones pre-

<sup>1</sup> See James Moffatt, *The Holy Bible: A New Translation*, Genesis 37: 17-36.

tended to their sorrowful father that Joseph had been killed by a wild animal. In the meantime Joseph was sold by the caravan to some Egyptians. Life in Egypt brought him many temptations, but he remained such a trustworthy person that the Egyptians gave him a position of leadership. During a terrible famine he was made director over the granaries and became one of the most powerful officials in Egypt.

Perhaps this period when Joseph was raised to power and dignity may have been during the liberal rule of Akhenaton.

Canaan was also suffering from famine, and it happened that Joseph's own brothers came to Egypt in search of grain. Joseph recognized them and had a good chance to test their ways. When he found that they were no longer as cruel as they had been to him as a boy, he revealed himself to them, forgave them for their bad treatment of him, and gave them plenty of grain to help them through the days of famine. As a result of this, the whole family settled in Egypt.

It seems very curious to learn that the Egyptians also told an old story which is similar in some ways to the temptation of the Joseph story in our Bible. In Egypt it is known as the "Tale of the Two Brothers." Anubis and Bata were two gods who appeared as two peasant brothers. Bata is tempted by the wife of Anubis to be unfaithful to his brother, much as Joseph was tempted by the wife of Potiphar (Genesis 39). Bata arose in great anger and said to her, "Lo, thou art with me like a mother and thy husband is with me like a father, for he being older than I hath brought me up. What is this shameful thing that thou hast said to me?" Bata rushed forth into the field. The wife of Anubis also became angry, because she had not succeeded in tempting Bata, so she told a false story to her husband. Believing her, Anubis took a weapon and hid himself near the stable door. Just as Bata came near with the cows from the pasture, two of them warned him of his danger and Bata fled away and was saved.<sup>2</sup>

### *Teachings of the Hebrews and Egyptians Compared*

It seems evident that there are Hebrew writings which are not as old as those of the Egyptians but are much like some of them. For example compare these:

<sup>2</sup> Breasted, *op. cit.*, p. 358.

*Egyptian*

*More acceptable is the virtue of the upright man than the ox of him that doeth iniquity.<sup>3</sup>*

*Hebrew*

To do righteousness and justice is more acceptable to the Lord than sacrifice (Proverbs 21:3).

An Egyptian wise man, called Amenemope, wrote beautiful teachings for his son (about the 10th century B.C.), warning the boy against cheating, being greedy, and seeking for riches. Honesty and goodness in every way seemed to Amenemope to be the will of his god. His teachings are now preserved in the British museum in London on papyrus. His words remind us of some of the wisest prophets and teachers of the later Hebrews, and sometimes of Jesus. Parts of them were translated by the Hebrews and may be read in the Bible. Compare these writings of Amenemope, for example, with the parallel quotations from the Book of Proverbs:

*Egyptian*

Say not, "I have found a protector,  
Now I can attack the hated man."  
Set thyself in the arms of God,  
Until thy silence overthroweth  
them his enemies)<sup>4</sup>

(Amenemope XXII, 1-8).

Better is praise as one whom men  
love,  
Than riches in the storehouse<sup>5</sup>  
(Amenemope XVI, 11-12).  
Weary not thyself to seek for more  
When thy need is (already) secure.  
If riches be brought to thee by  
robbery,  
They will not abide the night with  
thee. . . .  
They have made themselves wings  
like geese,  
And they have flown to heaven<sup>6</sup>  
(Amenemope IX, 14-X, 5).

*Hebrew*

Do not say, "I will repay evil";  
wait for the Lord, and he will help  
you" (Proverbs 20:22).

Better is a dry morsel with quiet  
than a house full of feasting with  
strife (Proverbs 17:1).

Do not toil to acquire wealth;  
Be wise enough to desist.

When your eyes light upon it, it  
is gone;  
for suddenly it takes to itself wings,  
flying like an eagle toward heaven  
(Proverbs 23:4-5).

You might also like to compare the advice of an Egyptian father to his son (see page 65) with Proverbs 22:17-23:11.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 156.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 376.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 375.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 373-374.

# 8

## *The Hebrews*

## *Enslaved in Egypt*

ACCORDING TO ANCIENT STORIES, after the Hebrews lived in Egypt for some centuries, an Egyptian ruler began to enslave them, compelling them to help to build some of his great granaries and cities. Later Hebrew writers explained that this treatment was probably due to the increase in the numbers of Hebrews, leading the Egyptians to fear them in times of war. Life grew very hard for the Hebrews. The Egyptians compelled them to make sun-dried bricks without straw. Even to this day in Egypt you may see people mixing mud with straw, then cutting it into little cakes and letting the sun bake it. If straw is not used in the mud, however, the bricks crumble and the work is lost.

The old city of Pithom has been excavated from the sand in Egypt. It was found to have some houses built partly of bricks with straw and partly of bricks without straw. Presumably this is one of the cities that the enslaved Hebrews helped to build as a store city for the Pharaoh of that time. Its construction is mentioned in Exodus 1:11.

In the dynasty following that of Akhenaton, there were two great kings, Seti I (c. 1319—c. 1301 B.C.) and his son Ramesses II (c. 1301—c. 1234 B.C.). Ramesses II had a great building program. He built for himself a large mortuary temple up the Nile River at Thebes, known as the Ramesseum, besides adding to the vast and enormous temples of Luxor and Karnak. Still farther up the Nile at Abu Simbel, Ramesses II had a temple

hewn out of rock in the sandstone cliff above the Nile, with four gigantic statues of himself (65 feet high) before it. Now it is being moved because a new dam would put it under water. Ramesses II, however, made his seat of government down the Nile in the old Hyksos city of Avaris, which he called Tanis, greatly enlarging and beautifying it. In the Bible, this is the region generally associated with the Hebrews. Probably under this ruler, they were forced by taskmasters to build the great store cities of Pithom and Tanis, or Raamses. Raamses was called "House of Ramesses," "House of Rameses," and "House of Raamses."

### *Moses Escapes to Midian*

According to the Bible record, it was in the days of Moses that life in Egypt became intolerable for the Hebrews. His name is like the Egyptian word *mesu* meaning "child." The Bible contains many stories about him, most of which were told for hundreds of years before they were written. Therefore we do not know exactly what Moses did do. We read that he was learned "in all the wisdom of the Egyptians" (Acts 7:22), and we know that the Hebrews have always thought of him as one of their greatest leaders. In some way he was able to free them from their terrible bondage and help them to make a new beginning in the desert.

According to Exodus, Moses became incensed as he watched the cruel treatment of his fellow countrymen and the heavy loads they had to bear. One day when he saw an Egyptian striking one of them, he "looked round; there was no one to be seen, so he knocked the Egyptian down and hid his body in the sand" (Exodus 2:12, Moffatt). On the next day, to his surprise, Moses discovered that his act, which had appeared to him to be a secret, had become known to others. This made Moses afraid. "When Pharaoh heard of it, he sought to kill Moses. But Moses fled from Pharaoh, and stayed in the land of Midian" (Exodus 2:15).

Moses found a place of refuge in the wilderness and made friends with a desert tribe of people known as the Kenites or Midianites. Jethro, a priest, became the special friend of Moses and gave him his daughter to marry (cf. Exodus 3:1). It was the custom of nomads, when the man was too poor to pay a

dowry for his wife, to take him into the house of the girl and to give him her name. Thus Moses lived according to his wife's customs and worshiped her god.

### *Moses Learns About Yahweh*

One of the important gods of these Midianites was Yahweh. Some scholars think that Moses learned about him from Jethro and the other Kenites and first began to worship him here. We must remember that it was then thought very necessary to have the favor of the gods of the land in which one lives. An old story of Moses seems to indicate that Yahweh was a new god to him and the Hebrews of Egypt.

Then Moses said to God, "If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?" God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM." And he said, "Say this to the people of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you'" (Exodus 3:13-14).

In Numbers 10:29 Moses says to Hobab: "We are setting out for the place of which the Lord said, 'I will give it to you'; come with us, and we will do you good; for the Lord has promised good to Israel."

Notwithstanding Moses' invitation, belief in numerous gods was still prevalent, as shown by Jethro's statement: "Now I know that the Lord is greater than all gods, because he delivered the people from under the hand of the Egyptians, when they dealt arrogantly with them" (Exodus 18:11).

### *The Hebrews Escape to Midian*

The Hebrews, who had been groaning under their bondage, finally escaped from Egyptian power sometime after c. 1300 B.C. with the help of Moses. Numerous tales were told of this dramatic event. The explanations were written down between four and five hundred years later when the unknown authors J and E each wrote a scroll about the Hebrews, J about 850 B.C. and E about 750 B.C. In these records we find numerous miracles performed by Moses under the direction of Yahweh.

The release of the Hebrews by the Pharaoh (perhaps Merenptah, a weaker king, son of Ramesses II) through the power of Moses led to their flight across the Reed Sea, or Sea of Reeds

(called the Red Sea in your Bible). This escape was so significant that numerous references are made to the power of Yahweh in thus helping the Hebrews and destroying the Egyptians (Exodus 14:21-31). The poem of wild jubilation may have been passed along for centuries. It is known as Miriam's Song of Victory. It is written that Miriam snatched up her timbrel and led a crowd of women in a victory dance. Triumphant she sang:

“Sing to the Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously;  
the horse and his rider he has thrown into the sea” (Exodus 15:21).

To this event the Hebrews always returned. They believed Yahweh had saved them.

There are other songs of rejoicing which the Hebrews sang for hundreds of years as they looked back upon their escape from Egypt. The following is typical:

I will sing to the Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously;  
horse and his rider he has thrown into the sea.

The Lord is my strength and my song,  
and he has become my salvation;  
this is my God, and I will praise him,  
my father's God, and I will exalt him.

The Lord is a man of war;  
the Lord is his name.

Pharaoh's chariots and his host he cast into the sea;  
and his picked officers are sunk in the Red Sea.

The floods cover them;  
they went down into the depths like a stone.

Thy right hand, O Lord, glorious in power,  
thy right hand, O Lord, shatters the enemy (Exodus 15:1-6).

Some of their songs seem cruel and revengeful to us today. But wars have always made people savage and cruel. In these old songs Yahweh appeared to be caring only for the Hebrews and not for the Egyptians. It was hundreds of years later before the Hebrews came to understand that God is one God of all people, that he loves them all equally, and that he is a God of love and of goodness (cf. Leviticus 19:17-18, 33, 34).

We do not know what really did happen to effect their escape, for they had not yet begun to keep records. Perhaps it was an earthquake or the eruption of a volcano. Perhaps a heavy wind blew these shallow waters so that the Hebrews

passed across the marshy ground safely. *Something* unusual took place. Whatever it was, their escape convinced Moses that the God of the land, Yahweh, was the Hebrews' friend and deliverer. It was Yahweh, now, upon whom they could depend. Therefore, in Midian they promised always to worship him. We can understand how much these people must have been impressed by the wonders of a strange mountain and particularly by their escape from their oppressors. This escape from the Egyptians became so important that Jews tell the story to this day during their Passover festival.

### *Yahweh, the God of the Mountain*

Yahweh appears to have been regarded in Midian as the God of the mountain. The Bible speaks often of Yahweh at Sinai, which was situated in the territory of the Kenites or Midianites. On this mountain he seemed to dwell. The sound of the wind and the appearance of fire on Sinai were associated with Yahweh. He was worshiped with great fear and seemed to the people to have been the most powerful God in this land, for he was thought to send fire and destruction that made even the strongest man helpless. The descriptions of Sinai in our Bible make it appear to be much like a volcano. We read "And Mount Sinai was wrapped in smoke, because the Lord descended upon it in fire; and the smoke of it went up like the smoke of a kiln, and the whole mountain quaked greatly" (Exodus 19:18). Quite naturally all Semitic tribes believed that such strange happenings were caused by a god.

Then the earth reeled and rocked;  
the foundations also of the mountains trembled and quaked because he  
was angry.

Smoke went up from his nostrils, and devouring fire from his mouth;  
glowing coals flamed forth from him. (Psalms 18:7-8).

The earth trembled, and the heavens dropped, yea, the clouds dropped  
water.

The mountains quaked before the Lord, yon Sinai before the Lord, the  
God of Israel (Judges 5:4b, 5).

When the Hebrews later journeyed into the desert, they referred to Yahweh's appearance while guiding them as a pillar of fire or a pillar of cloud. Perhaps these were the fire and smoke of a great volcano. Yahweh may have been worshiped as

a God of fire: "For the Lord your God is a devouring fire, a jealous God" (Deuteronomy 4:24). "Now the appearance of the glory of the Lord was like a devouring fire on the top of the mountain in the sight of the people of Israel" (Exodus 24:17). It seems likely that Yahweh came to be known just as a desert deity and was associated with fire. This desert experience with heat would be most real and it could suggest the constant presence of a deity who was associated with fire and perhaps with wrath.

### *Yahweh, a God of the Storms*

Lightning and rain were thought to be sent directly by Yahweh. A Hebrew writer declares in an old Psalm that the thunder is the voice of Yahweh (cf. Psalm 29:3-9). Nearer the time of Jesus the writer of Job said:

What is the way to the place where the light is distributed,  
or where the east wind is scattered upon the earth?  
Who has cleft a channel for the torrents of rain,  
and a way for the thunderbolt,  
to bring rain on a land where no man is,  
on the desert in which there is no man;  
to satisfy the waste and desolate land,  
and to make the ground put forth grass?  
(Job 38:24-27)

Today we do not think as the early Semites did about God. We have come to understand the causes of rain and storms and we feel that God works through orderly processes. Yet the ways of nature are still mysterious and wonderful to us and lead us to believe that God is much greater than primitive people had ever comprehended. Even more, we believe that God is the Creator and Sustainer of the orderly processes and laws of the whole universe.

### *Yahweh, a God of War*

Besides his activities in nature, Yahweh was worshiped as a God who helped his people in their wars. When the Kenite-Midianites won a victory in a time of war over some other tribe, they said that Yahweh had helped them defeat the god of the other tribe. In a way, wars were battles between the gods of different tribes. When the Kenite-Midianites were victorious,

this must have made Yahweh the God to be feared and worshiped by other tribes. Perhaps this belief in Yahweh's power attracted Moses and the oppressed Hebrews. They needed a strong God. In one of the oldest Hebrew hymns are the words: "The Eternal knows well how to fight" (Exodus 15:3, Moffatt). Frequently in the Old Testament, we find that the Hebrews gave Yahweh the title "Yahweh Sabaoth" which meant that he was God of armies.

While the true God of the universe was seeking the Hebrews, they slowly came to understand more and more of his nature and his truth.

### *The Covenant with Yahweh*

After the safe deliverance of the Hebrews, Moses reported to Jethro. Then Jethro, in his capacity as the priest of Midian, arranged a great festival of sacrifice. On this occasion perhaps the Hebrews may have been initiated into the worship of God, Yahweh. The following seems significant.

And Jethro rejoiced for all the good which the Lord had done to Israel, in that he had delivered them out of the hand of the Egyptians.

And Jethro said, "Blessed be the Lord, who has delivered you out of the hand of the Egyptians and out of the hand of Pharaoh. Now I know that the Lord is greater than all gods, because he delivered the people from under the hand of the Egyptians, when they dealt arrogantly with them." And Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, offered a burnt offering and sacrifices to God; and Aaron came with all the elders of Israel to eat bread with Moses' father-in-law before God (Exodus 18:9-12).

Following this solemn event, Moses, Aaron, and seventy other Hebrew leaders are reported holding a sacrificial feast to Yahweh without Jethro. They set up an altar near the mountain and arranged twelve pillars around it. Animals were slain and their blood put in basins. Half of the blood was sprinkled on the altar. Then the Hebrews promised to be obedient to all that Yahweh had spoken. Moses next sprinkled the other half of the blood of the animals on the people as a sign of their pledge of loyalty to God.

And he sent young men of the people of Israel, who offered burnt offerings of oxen to the Lord. And Moses took half of the blood and put it in basins, and half of the blood he threw against the altar. Then he took the book of the covenant, and read it in the hearing of the

people; and they said, "All that the Lord has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient." And Moses took the blood and threw it upon the people, and said, "Behold the blood of the covenant which the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words" (Exodus 24:5-8).

After the escape from Egypt, the leaders struggled to keep the Hebrews loyal to Yahweh. In later times a writer reports the following challenge of Joshua:

Now therefore fear the Lord, and serve him in sincerity and in faithfulness; put away the gods which your fathers served beyond the River, and in Egypt, and serve the Lord. And if you be unwilling to serve the Lord, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your fathers served in the region beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell; but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord (Joshua 24:14, 15).

Probably the people in the north of Arabia had known Yahweh for hundreds of years. During these very ancient times when Moses and the Hebrews worshiped Yahweh, it was believed that he gave life to the tribe and did many marvelous things. Through him came sons and daughters. It was he who caused grass and trees to grow. In later times the people grew to understand that the power and domain of Yahweh included Canaan and governed Hebrew life in all its forms. The following passage, which is phrased as a command of Yahweh himself, has thrown light on this truth.

Go and tell my servant David, "Thus says the Lord: Would you build me a house to dwell in? I have not dwelt in a house since the day I brought up the people of Israel from Egypt to this day, but I have been moving about in a tent for my dwelling. In all places where I have moved with all the people of Israel, did I speak a word with any of the Judges of Israel, whom I commanded to shepherd my people Israel saying, 'Why have you not built me a house of cedar?'" (2 Samuel 7:5-7).

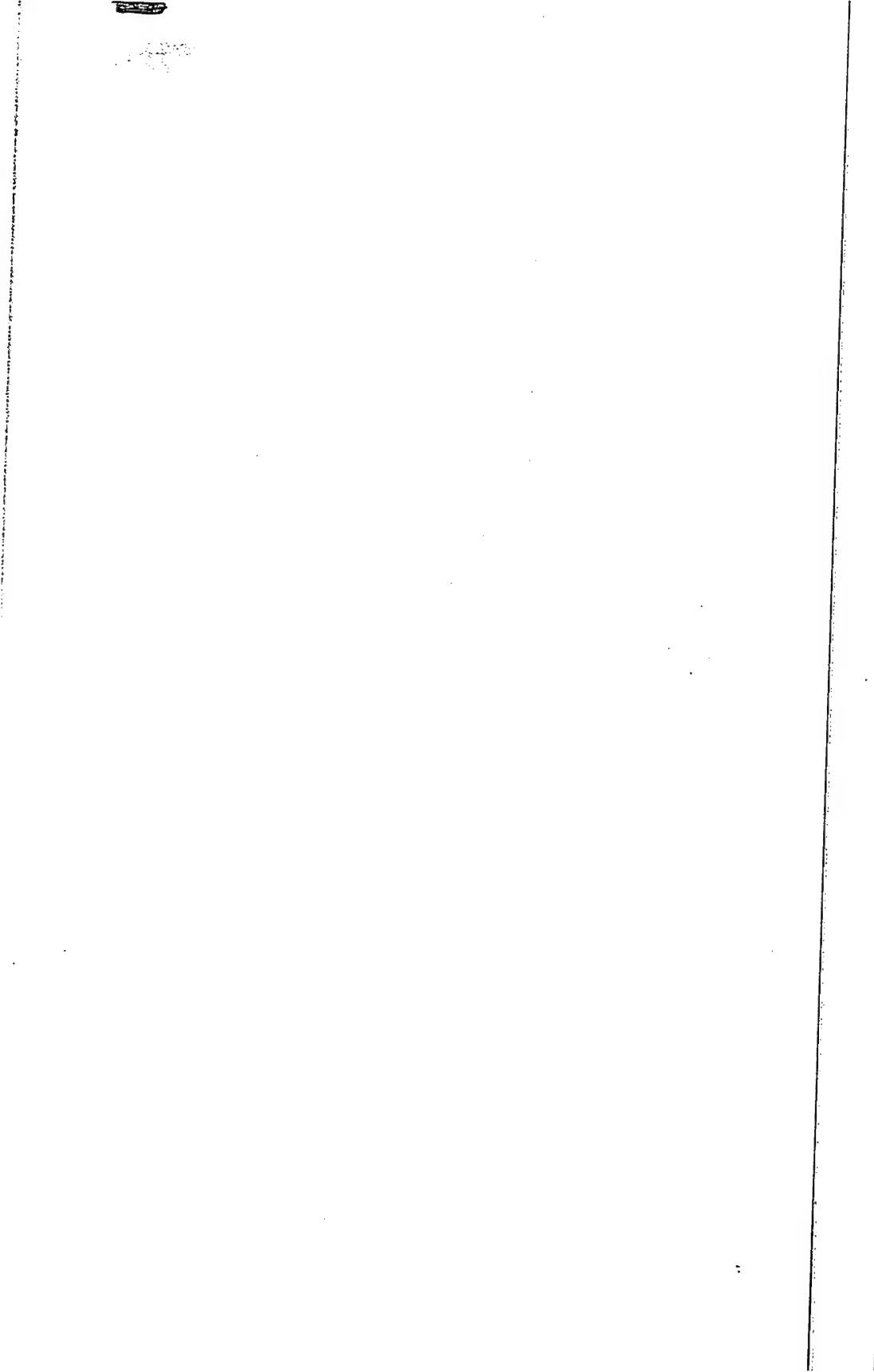
As centuries passed, the great writers of the Hebrew religion could not imagine a time when their people had worshiped many gods and spirits. They sometimes wrote as if Yahweh had always been their god. But we must remember that it took a great many hundreds of years for these people of the desert to grow in their comprehension of God so that they could understand him as the one true God who is like a father to all people everywhere.

The Hebrews first understood Yahweh as being what seems to us very cruel and warlike, far from the nature of the God of Jesus. Then, after some hundreds of years, they began to understand that Yahweh requires goodness and noble living, instead of offerings of animals and warlike deeds against their neighbors.

The Hebrews never forgot their wonderful escape from Egypt under the leadership of Moses. As centuries passed by, more and more of their religious beliefs and laws were credited to Moses. Moses seemed to the Hebrews to be the father and creator of all that was great in their history. They called the first five books of the Old Testament *The Books of Moses*, though they were written and compiled centuries after his time.

Apart from poems or songs (see Judges 5), myths, and legends, the first attempt to write up the religious story of the Hebrews took place sometime after the rule of Solomon between 950 and 850 B.C. This unknown author whom scholars call "J" (see Chapter 19) looked back upon the past in terms of the religion of his own time and interpreted what he could find about the past in the light of his own beliefs.

God's revelation came through mankind, who grew slowly in their understanding of truth. In time, they came to comprehend Yahweh as the one and only God of the universe, the God of all people. Then they became concerned about God's relation with man and his world. In Jesus came the fullest expression of God, and it is to his life and teaching that we compare all that came before.



*III*

*Life and Worship  
in a  
New Land*



## 9

*The Hebrew Struggle  
for a  
New Life in Canaan*

LIFE IN MIDIAN WAS DIFFICULT for the Hebrew refugees from Egypt (cf. Judges 1:1-23). About 1250 B.C., it appears that they moved closer to Canaan and began attacks on some of the cities. Since the old cities of Canaan were walled for defense, the invasion must have been a very difficult operation for these Hebrew semi-nomads. It seems that attempts were made to enter first from the south of Canaan. Apparently the Hebrew invaders destroyed Lachish, a royal city, some time near 1230 B.C., as told in the Book of Joshua:

And Joshua passed on from Libnah, and all Israel with him, to Lachish, and laid siege to it, and assaulted it: and the Lord gave Lachish into the hand of Israel, and he took it on the second day, and smote it with the edge of the sword, and every person in it, as he had done to Libnah (Joshua 10:31, 32).

Long before this, probably about 1700 B.C., Lachish had once served for the horses and chariots of the Hyksos who invaded Syria, Canaan, and Egypt. It was later made into a fortress. Archaeologists in recent times at Lachish have found evidence of a terrific destruction sometime near 1230 B.C., including the ruins of a little Canaanite temple of the period 1500-1230 B.C. The worshiper passed through a small vestibule of this temple to enter the sanctuary. Before him was a raised shrine with steps for the priest. On the top of the shrine or altar there stood, probably, the figure of some god. Around three sides were benches, one of which was used for the offerings. On the

right side of the altar was a pottery stand to hold the bowl for libation. To the left was a large bin for offerings of grain or meat.

### *Further Conquests*

The Hebrews also moved around to the East by way of Edom, Moab, and Ammon (cf. Numbers 21:21-33). They apparently tried to enter Canaan through Jericho, an ancient walled city with crowded hovels and narrow streets. Perhaps the Hebrews finally entered this city through the assistance of spies (cf. Joshua 2:6), or possibly because of an earthquake. These stories were written centuries after the event, so we are uncertain about the details. Archaeologists have found evidence of fire and great destruction. Charred beams, mats, thatch, and foodstuffs such as onions, bread, dates, wheat, barley, and oats have been discovered in these ancient ruins of the period of the Hebrew invasion.

The central part of Canaan is rugged and hilly, rising at times to 3000 feet above sea level. To the west is the great plain along the Mediterranean Sea. To the east is the deep cleft of the Jordan Valley. The Canaanites lived chiefly in the fertile lowlands to the west. Their important cities were Megiddo, Taanach, Engannim, Shunem, and Jezreel.

The Hebrews found that they could not capture many of the Canaanite cities, because the walls were strong and the defenders were equipped with chariots. So they settled in the hills, where fewer Canaanites lived.

And the Lord was with Judah, and he took possession of the hill country, but he could not drive out the inhabitants of the plain, because they had chariots of iron (Judges 1:19).

In the hill country of Canaan there had been a great city called Ai, which may have been a thousand years old in the time of Abraham. This city had been destroyed long before the conquest of Canaan by the Hebrews. Scholars believe that the Ai of the conquest was perhaps nearby Bethel (cf. Joshua 7-8).

There was an old high place (sanctuary) at Jerusalem. The Hebrews seem to have gained a foothold in this hill country and in Gilead across the Jordan, to the east. Gradually they

built their own simple towns (c. 1225—c. 1050 B.C.). The hills could be used to raise cattle, sheep, and goats. The Hebrews established themselves by conquest and by treaties with the inhabitants. In the Book of Joshua, however, the conquest appears more rapid than it actually was.

It was the custom to seek the help of the gods in times of war. The Hebrews depended on Yahweh to assist them in their invasion of Canaan. They believed that Yahweh had rescued them from Egypt and was particularly interested in their conquest of Canaan. His presence was carried into their battles in an ark.

### *The Hebrews Amidst the Canaanites*

The struggle to enter Canaan was cruel and often terrible. It was more than two hundred years before the Hebrews controlled Canaan under the two famous kings David and Solomon. We see something of their struggle in the following passages which tell of the continuing conflict with peoples not defeated by Joshua.

Manasseh did not drive out the inhabitants of Bethshean and its villages, or Taanach and its villages, or the inhabitants of Dor and its villages; or the inhabitants of Ibleam and its villages, or the inhabitants of Megiddo and its villages; but the Canaanites persisted in dwelling in that land. When Israel grew strong, they put the Canaanites to forced labor, but did not utterly drive them out (Judges 1:27-28).

And Ephraim did not drive out the Canaanites who dwelt in Gezer; but the Canaanites dwelt in Gezer among them (Judges 1:29).

Zebulun did not drive out the inhabitants of Kitron, or the inhabitants of Nahalol; but the Canaanites dwelt among them, and became subject to forced labor (Judges 1:30).

Asher did not drive out the inhabitants of Acco, or the inhabitants of Sidon, or of Ahlab, or of Achzib, or of Helbah, or of Aphik, or of Rehob; but the Asherites dwelt among the Canaanites, the inhabitants of the land; for they did not drive them out (Judges 1:31, 32).

Naphtali did not drive out the inhabitants of Bethshemesh, or the inhabitants of Beth-anath, but dwelt among the Canaanites, the inhabitants of the land; nevertheless the inhabitants of Beth-shemesh and of Beth-anath became subject to forced labor for them (Judges 1:33).

The Amorites pressed the Danites back into the hill country, for they did not allow them to come down to the plain; the Amorites persisted in dwelling in Har-heres, in Aijalon, and in Sha-albim, but the hand of the house of Joseph rested heavily upon them, and they became subject to forced labor. And the border of the Amorites ran from the ascent of Akrabbim, from Sela and upward (Judges 1:34-36).

Yet the sons of Manasseh could not take possession of those cities; but the Canaanites persisted in dwelling in that land. But when the people of Israel grew strong, they put the Canaanites to forced labor, and did not utterly drive them out (Joshua 17:12, 13).

### *Other Hebrew Tribes*

It seems clear that when the Hebrew refugees from Egypt finally entered Canaan from the eastern side of the Jordan River, they found numerous other Hebrew tribes already in this land. These earlier Hebrew settlers apparently were found in the central highlands, in the middle of Canaan. There was enmity and struggle against these many Hebrew tribes as well as with the Canaanites and the Philistines.

### *Judges*

Each Hebrew tribe lived under strong men, or chiefs, called judges. The Book of Judges tells many interesting tales of the primitive and warlike conditions under which these numerous Hebrew tribes lived in Canaan.

One of these tribal leaders was a woman called Deborah. In her time we read of another woman named Jael, who was as cruel as the men. Their savagery must have been sung for centuries for we have an ancient poem about them in Judges:

Hear, O kings; give ear, O princes;  
to the Lord I will sing,  
I will make melody to the Lord, the God of Israel.

The peasantry ceased in Israel, they ceased  
until you arose, Deborah,  
arose as a mother in Israel.

Tell of it, you who ride on tawny asses,  
you who sit on rich carpets  
and you who walk by the way.

To the sound of musicians at the watering places,  
there they repeat the triumphs of the Lord,  
the triumphs of his peasantry in Israel.

Then down to the gates marched the people of the Lord.

Awake, awake, Deborah!

Awake, awake, utter a song!

Arise, Barak, lead away your captives,  
O son of Abinoam.

Most blessed of women be Jael,  
the wife of Heber the Kenite,  
of tent-dwelling women most blessed.

He asked water and she gave him milk,  
she brought him curds in a lordly bowl.

She put her hand to the tent peg  
and her right hand to the workmen's mallet;  
she struck Sisera a blow,  
she crushed his head,  
she shattered and pierced his temple (*Judges 5:3-26, passim*).

Each clan or tribe of Hebrews presumably lived according to its own peculiarities (cf. Deuteronomy 33). We read that Jair had its own village (cf. Numbers 32:41), as did other tribes. Covenants between tribes and constant reorganization took place.

The neat organization of the Hebrews into twelve tribes or clans seems to be an idealized account of later times. Perhaps in the course of time, the Hebrews were organized around a central religious shrine. This central shrine was at Shiloh (cf. Judges 21:19; 1 Samuel 1:3). The passage in Judges 21 describes it as the place of celebration of an annual festival of Yahweh. In 1 Samuel 1:3ff., we read that Hannah, Samuel's mother, went up to Shiloh once a year to worship Yahweh there. Archaeologists have uncovered an extensive settlement at Shiloh which appears to belong to the twelfth or early eleventh century. Houses were found that had been destroyed by fire, perhaps by the Philistines in 1050 B.C.

During the period of tribal divisions under chiefs, the Hebrews seem to have had other shrines for worship, such as Bethel, Gilgal, Dan, and perhaps Beersheba. According to the account in Joshua 24, after some successes, the Hebrew tribes met at Shechem near the oak of Moreh. Shechem had been a city of the Hyksos invaders (c. 1700 B.C.). When the Hebrew tribes formed their confederacy and became known as Israelites, Shechem was their most important city. It had become the center of the Joseph tribe under Joshua's leadership. There

are dramatic accounts of Abimelech, whose mother was from Shechem (see Judges 8:31; 9:1-57). He tried to forge a kingdom out of Shechem and the area around it, but he failed and finally devastated Shechem about 1100 B.C. It was perhaps rebuilt in the time of David.

The dramatic tales of Eglon, Shamgar, Jabin, and Samson seem to go back to the early days of the Hebrew invasion of Canaan. The Samson folk tales give colorful insights into life on the Philistine border (cf. Judges 13, 14, 15, 16).

### *The Philistines*

Between the thirteenth and twelfth centuries, the Philistines and some other sea peoples invaded the coast of Palestine. The Philistines controlled the five important cities and their surroundings: Gaza, Ashkelon, Ashdod, Ekron, and Gath.

They brought a culture and ornate pottery which may have been derived from several sources, representing lands through which they had passed as they migrated eastward, probably from the Aegean region by way of Crete. Whatever their origin, they represented a civilization which was completely separate from that of the Sumerians and Egyptians, but also significant. By 1050 B.C. the Philistines defeated the Hebrews at Ebenezer, a location which is unknown to us (1 Samuel 4:1; 5:1), and captured the sacred Ark of Yahweh. As the story is told in 1 Samuel 4-6, the Philistines regarded the battle to have been between the gods of each group. When a pestilence came to Philistia, the Philistines feared the power of Yahweh in the Ark and they returned it to the people of Bethshemesh.

The following passage represents Yahweh as God of battles in these struggles of the Hebrews:

The Lord is a man of war;  
the Lord is his name.

Thy right hand, O Lord, glorious in power,  
thy right hand, O Lord, shatters the enemy (Exodus 15:3, 6).

During the eleventh century, iron was just coming into use in Palestine. The Philistines attempted to keep it under their own control and out of the hands of the Hebrews. We read:

Now there was no smith to be found throughout all the land of Israel; for the Philistines said, "Lest the Hebrews make themselves swords or

spears"; but every one of the Israelites went down to the Philistines to sharpen his plowshare, his mattock, his axe, or his sickle . . . (1 Samuel 13-19, 20).

It was in the time of Saul (1020-1000 B.C.) and David (1000-960 B.C.) that the Hebrews broke the power of the Philistines.

### Chart 1. Order of Events in the Hebrew Story

Before the Stone Age, It was many thousands of years ago that the modern physical type of man developed on the earth. Palestine had been inhabited a very long time. The Galilee skull belonged to the Paleolithic Age (c. 100,000 years ago). By 8000 B.C., the people around the fertile crescent were learning to domesticate animals. By 7000 B.C., Jericho was a city, the oldest one known in the world. By 6000 B.C. (Neolithic or late Stone Age), advances were being made in agriculture. Then other aspects of civilization could grow.

4000-2700 B.C. Pottery was made in Jericho. Old houses and shrines existed in Jericho. In Sumer, cuneiform writing was done on clay tablets (c. 3000 B.C.). Soon after 3000 B.C. the Great Pyramid of Egypt was built by Khufu (Cheops). About 2700 B.C. the Egyptians wrote in picture language or hieroglyphics.

1750-1290 B.C. Hyksos invaded Palestine (perhaps by 1750 B.C.) and then Egypt by 1730 B.C. They brought chariots and horses. Very likely some Hebrew tribe was able to go to Egypt under these Hyksos — about 1720 B.C. They lived at Tanis (Raamses) or Zoan in Egypt. The great lawmaker, Hammurabi, ruled in the land of Babylonia between the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers sometime between 2000 and 1750 B.C. Akhenaton ruled in Egypt c. 1375-1358 B.C.

1290-935 B.C. Up to this time the Hebrews had not been a united people and had written none of the Bible. Perhaps some Hebrews were enslaved by Rameses II (c. 1301-c. 1234 B.C.). Finally Moses arose as their leader and helped them to escape. Living among the Kenites (or Midianites) these Hebrews (led by Moses) became worshipers of Yahweh. About 1250 B.C. the Hebrews were able to invade parts of Canaan and to settle there. Finally under Saul, they were victorious over the Philistines. Then came David, their greatest king (about 1000 B.C.), and they became organized as a united people into a large kingdom. He ruled until about 970 B.C. and was followed by King Solomon (c. 935-900 B.C.).

Before 1200 B.C. Soon after the Hebrews invaded Canaan, they adopted the Covenant Code of Laws. This was of Canaanite origin. It is disarranged in our Old Testament, but is seen in the *old ritual decalogue* in Exodus 34:10-36. Here we find the law asking for the sacrifice of the firstborn son (Exodus 13:2, 11:16; 22:29b-30a; Numbers 18:15; Deuteronomy 15:19-23).

*10*  
*Ancient Life*  
*in*  
*Canaan*

PALESTINE IS A VERY ANCIENT LAND. The Jordan Valley was formed about two million years ago, and there is evidence that people lived in that general area as long as 120,000 to 150,000 years ago. Human skeletons believed to date back to that period of the dim past have been found, including several in a cave south of Nazareth and others (the oldest known deposits of prehistoric man, including a Neanderthal skull) in two caves above the Sea of Galilee where the people presumably lived as a protection against storms, animals, and enemies.

It was a very long time before man learned how to use the resources around him, but sometime before 6000 B.C. he learned how to herd animals and farm the soil. As civilization grew, impetus was given to the development of speech.

By 6,000 B.C. great advances had been made in the cultivation of crops, animal breeding, the use of polished implements, and a more settled form of life. Already Jericho had several thousand years of history.

In the southern part of Palestine is the Negeb, in which archaeologists have found that people were living in villages with mud-brick houses over 5,000 years ago. These people tilled the soil, wove cloth, made fired pottery, carved ivory images, and forged copper tools and weapons. They used great skill in bringing water to irrigate the land so that they could cultivate it. More recently the people of Israel have been doing much the same thing as they bring this desert back into

agricultural uses, and they have learned much about its possible uses by studying the distant past.

### *The Canaanites*

The name "Canaan" is applied to the land between Syria and Sinai where various tribes, including the several Hebrew tribes, came to live. Most of these invaders were nomadic Semites who were seeking fertile lands. When Hebrew tribes came to Canaan, other invaders had already established an advanced civilization.

About 2000 B.C., some people from the northeast traveled to the shores of the Mediterranean Sea. They were the ancestors of the Phoenicians and the Canaanites. Later (1500-1000 B.C.), the Aramaeans came into Syria and northern Palestine from the deserts of Arabia. The Canaanite and Phoenician peoples were the same in culture and language tradition.

The Phoenicians settled along the narrow stretch of coast in northern Palestine. They were seamen and merchants whose ships sailed as far as Britain to procure tin and copper. They made numerous settlements around the Mediterranean. Prior to 1500 B.C., the Phoenicians dominated the islands of the eastern Mediterranean. Their ships must have spread the Aramaic types of languages and their own invention of an alphabet. Their first capital was Sidon; Byblos was one of their earliest settlements; Tyre and Arvad were other port cities. These people became famous for handicrafts, work in metal, and dyeing.

### *Discoveries at Ugarit*

The old Phoenician city of Ugarit (once Ras Shamrah) was discovered by a farmer in 1928. From its excavation in 1929 much information has come to us, especially from the Ras Shamrah clay tablets dating back to 1400 B.C. On them is the Ugaritic dialect, which seems closely related to the Hebrew language but written in cuneiform characters.

These Ras Shamrah tablets have given to scholars a vast amount of knowledge of the Syria-Palestine peoples among whom the several Hebrew tribes came to settle. Their poetry, myths, and legends provide much insight into the religion of Ugarit. The Ugaritic epics contain many close parallels to the

poetry in the Hebrew Bible, especially to the earliest poems. There are whole verses, phrases, single words, and style resemblances. Dr. Albright, who writes of these matters, says there are at least forty pairs of biblical parallels to these Canaanite poems and eighty words that appear in the Bible.

Quantities of inscribed tablets, in boxes, have been excavated at Ugarit. The writing is done partly in Babylonian and partly in Canaanite alphabetic texts. Much of this material helps us to understand the old myths of Ugarit as well as to interpret better the early Hebrew poetry. Now the Psalms can be more accurately understood and better translations of them can be made.

### *Cities and Industries*

The Canaanites doubtless lived in small communities, each headed by a king. These communities grew up around a city which would be fortified with walls and towers. In times of danger or for business, the rural people came into the fortified city. Such cities were small, covering about six acres. Their walls were about twenty-one feet high. Among such Canaanite cities were Byblos, Sidon, Tyre, Gezer, Lachish, Megiddo, Shechem, and Jerusalem. Because of the divisions of these people into separate communities, it was easy for outside invaders to attack them.

The chief industries of Canaan were farming, fishing, and trade. Wheat, barley, oats, beans, grapes, figs, pomegranates, and nuts were used much as they are today. There were cows, sheep, asses, goats, pigs, and dogs. Meat, boiled in large pots, was usually eaten only on festive days. Water for cooking was lifted from wells or springs and carried on the head in water jars or water skins. Lamps were clay saucers, pinched on one side of the rim to hold a wick.

Spinning and weaving were done at home. The earliest cloth was perhaps made of wool. Mention is made of its use among the early Babylonians. Linen is referred to in the old Gezer calendar which has been dug up in recent times.

### *Personal Appearance*

Illustrations in the mural paintings of the rock tombs of Egypt (1750 B.C.) show Canaanites wearing long garments,

reaching from the shoulder to the knee, made of dyed cloth and trimmed with braid or sometimes with embroidery. This was first the kind of costume worn by the king and later adopted by the common people. Canaanite captives are represented on Egyptian monuments as wearing shirts or short tunics and an overgarment of a long strip of cloth wound around the body. The hair falls down in thick masses over the neck.



(By permission of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago.)

Hundreds of carved ivories have been found in excavations at the city of Megiddo in an old palace. The art work on them reveals the style of Canaanitish life between 1350 and 1150 B.C. One interesting carved ivory shows a prince of Megiddo celebrating a victory. Naked captives are driven before his chariot; there is also a scene of the prince sitting upon an elaborate throne, drinking from a bowl, while a court minstrel plays upon a harp.

### *Religion in Canaan*

Deeply religious customs and beliefs were found by the Hebrew invaders of Canaan. The Ras Shamrah tablets reveal a great deal about these Canaanitish religious practices and beliefs. Ruling over all the gods was El, a faraway deity resembling Anu of Sumer-Accad and Ra, the sun god, in Egypt. The Canaanite word for "god" was originally *'ilum*, which later became *'el* meaning "the strong, powerful one." The word for gods was *'elim*, meaning "sons of god" or "members of a group." The god El was represented as living "at the source[s] of the [two] rivers in the midst of the fountains of the two deeps."<sup>1</sup> The Ras Shamrah stele portrays El as a bearded old man. El was known as the father of mankind and also as the father of seventy gods. Often he is portrayed as very cruel. Some rec-

<sup>1</sup> William Foxwell Albright, *Archaeology and the Religion of Israel* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1942), p. 72.

ords show him with Astarte, Asherah, and Baaltis as his wives. The mother Earth Goddess was Ahirat. Because it was believed that El managed the rain and the crops, the people made festivals and sacrifices to propitiate him. The name "El" suggests a relationship to the Hebrew El or Elohim in the Old Testament.

The Ras Shamrah tablets describe fertility myths upon which were based elaborate rituals. Much is recorded about the god Baal, who, after the fifteenth century was also known as the ancient Semitic Hadad. Baal was the high god, the king of the gods, comparable to the Greek Zeus. He was the storm god, in charge of storms and rains, and it was believed that he was heard in the clouds and that he shot forth the lightning. This god was believed to live in a high mountain far in the northern heavens. His temples were at Ugarit (Ras Shamrah) and Gaza.

The Canaanites were concerned about fertility, drought, and the changing seasons with the alternate dying and rising of vegetation. Lacking agricultural schools and modern research, they attributed the creation of man, animal, and plant to Baal. They were terrified at drought, and therefore they sought to keep Baal's favor by bringing him the correct food and wine and by conducting religious ceremonies in his honor.

The grain god, the son of Dagon, was the chief god of Ashdod (cf. 1 Samuel 5:1-7). Dagon was also one of the oldest gods of the Accadians who lived in the Euphrates Valley as far back as 2400 B.C. He was probably also a god of vegetation.

In 1 Kings 18:19 we read of Asherah as the consort or queen of Baal in the city of Samaria in the ninth century B.C. The names of the Canaanite gods appear to have changed from period to period. Several names are used in the Old Testament for the same deity. Anath and Astarte were the names of a mother-goddess. Astarte was also the goddess of the evening star. Frequently the names Asherah and Astarte refer to the same deity. Asherah was chiefly referred to as a goddess of the sea. Asherah, Astarte, and Anath appear also to have been goddesses concerned with sex and war. Vile and cruel behavior were in their power and work.

In their religious ceremonies, the Canaanites sacrificed many animals: bullocks, rams, ewes, lambs, kids, doves, and small birds. Doubtless other animals were also sacrificed. Sacrifice

was an important part of their religion, for it was essentially a feast or communion shared by the god and his worshiper. The Bible refers often to the sacrifices carried out by the Canaanites.

The Canaanites set up pillars of stone <sup>2</sup> to represent a god. References in the Old Testament to *asherah* refer to a "grove," which was not a cluster of trees but a wooden image which was set up in a high place beside altars of incense and stone pillars. The sacrifice of children seems to have been common (cf. Genesis 22:1-3; 2 Kings 3:27). The usual procedure was to bury sacrificed children in tapering jars, head first. In Jericho and other places such jars have been found under house floors. It was to a land with such a religion that the first Hebrew tribes came, and where Yahweh worship struggled to reveal the truth of the only high God of the universe.

### *Temples*

Before the Bible was written, men did not yet comprehend the Divine as an all-pervading Spirit (cf. John 4:24). They thought that it was only *in particular spots* that prayers could be heard or that spirits were present! There were numerous sacred or holy spots. Frequently at such places altars or temples were built to the god or gods. The temple was a sort of palace or residence for the god and was called the "house" of the specific god of the place. The ceremonies at such temples involved food, drink, incense, and other matters pertaining to the needs of the spirit. Man was required to supply these divine needs of the gods and for the performance of such service he could hope for reward. Often a statue was used to reveal the *presence* of the god. The statue was not the god; it was merely an image in the temple where this god was served.

Baal (or "lord") was also called Hadad, the god of the storm, the controller of rain, and the giver of fertility. He was not thought to be *confined* to one building. Many houses or palaces were built for this god in Canaan. We read of Baals (Judges 2:11) as if Hadad were several gods. He gradually

<sup>2</sup> In 1956, G. Ernest Wright and Bernhard Anderson began some brilliant excavations of ancient Shechem. They uncovered a series of Canaanite temples with massive pillars of stone, associated with the deity El-berith (cf. Judges 9:46).

came to be known as the Baal of a particular place as if he were split into numerous gods: the Baal of Peor, Baal-Zebul, Baal-hermon, Baal-tamar, and many more. The concept of such a multiple Baal was confusing.

Ancient temples have been found in Shechem, a city dating back to 3500 B.C. and the first capital of the Northern Kingdom after the rule of Solomon. Their finding is described by G. Ernest Wright in *Shechem — The Biography of a Biblical City*.

A very old temple to Baal was found at Megiddo (c. 3000 B.C.). The finest temple has been found at ancient Ai. In the main room were benches on which the offerings were placed, a small altar before a raised shrine on which incense could be offered, a libation stand, and lamps. Outside were a court and the chief altar for the burnt offerings.

When the Hebrews came into Canaan they were much affected by the worship already going on in this land. It took many centuries before they understood that Yahweh need not dwell in a local, sacred spot. The struggle can be seen in Deuteronomy 7:5; 16:21-22; 1 Kings 14:23-24. Solomon's Temple became the "House of the Lord" showing the temptation to localize Yahweh in one spot.

### *High Places*

In Canaan, as elsewhere, men found sites on natural high ground, or sometimes they built artificial hills, upon which they set up worship centers. The high places of Canaanitish worship seem to have had great influence upon the Hebrew invaders. That the Hebrews often were led to adopt the corrupt practices of worship at these high places is to be seen in the many denunciations by the Hebrew prophets. Their words in Judges 2:13; Jeremiah 32:35; 2 Kings 23:13; and 1 Samuel 7:3, 4 are illustrative of this.

### *Sacred Trees*

Man has always found trees fascinating. From time immemorial, a tree growing near a spring, near a burial place of a renowned person, or perhaps at the summit of a hill was feared and venerated. In the legends of the early Hebrews we discover that men believed in the presence of a god in the vicinity of a sacred tree. Such a location was considered

holy, not in the sense of goodness, but merely that the god was separate from man. Not only was the place mysterious, but it was supposed to have powers which were dangerous to man. Therefore, it could be approached only by fulfilling certain prescribed conditions very cautiously. By carefully observing elaborate customs and ceremonial laws primitive people felt that their relations with the gods would be safer and more profitable. In present-day Syria, the Moslems, Christians, and Druses continue to practice a custom of tying pieces of cloth on special trees.

When the Hebrews came to live in Canaan they discovered that the Canaanites had many places where a sacred tree implied the location of a god, who was to be worshiped there. The Hebrews doubtless followed some of these customs of the older inhabitants. Then, gradually, they began to worship Yahweh at these sacred places. Later, when Hebrew writers told their stories of their earlier heroes, they associated certain events with Yahweh at a sacred tree. Even after the Hebrews outgrew many of the forms of Baal worship, they continued to think of the presence of Yahweh at certain places such as springs, caves, shrines, and trees. The earliest records in the Old Testament are full of references to sacred trees (cf. Genesis 21:33).

The most usual trees that were singled out as sacred were the pine and the oak, especially the latter. The Hebrew writers used several names, and the probability is that, in many cases, they were referring to the tree which we would call an oak. We think that what they called teil trees and terebinth trees were often oak trees.

At Shechem, thirty or forty miles north of Jerusalem, was the "oak of Moreh," the "oak of teaching." It was believed that people received divine revelations at this tree and that it was here that Yahweh appeared to Abraham (cf. Genesis 12:6; 35:4; Deuteronomy 11:30; Joshua 24:26; Judges 9:37).

Outside Hebron there has been cultivated a sacred oak of Mamre which has been associated with Abraham. It is written that the Lord appeared to Abraham by the oaks of Mamre (cf. Genesis 18:1ff.). It is in this reference that the oaks are also called terebinths.

If we take into account the similarity between a large bush

and a small tree, the record of Moses' experience with a burning bush in the land of Midian seems to be related to the idea of sacred trees. One day, while Moses was leading the sheep of his father-in-law Jethro, near Mount Horeb, an angel of Yahweh appeared in a flaming bush and spoke to him. The angel commanded Moses to go back to Egypt and help to deliver the Hebrews from the oppression of the Egyptians (cf. Exodus 3:1-13).

Another ancient Hebrew story tells about Deborah, a prophetess, saying that "she used to sit under the palm of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim; and the people of Israel came to her for judgment" (Judges 4:5). Another story from the Book of Judges tells that Gideon was called to his work by an angel of Yahweh "under the oak at Ophrah" (Judges 6:11).

In the time of united Israel, the tamarisk tree seemed to be highly regarded. During the war between David and Saul we read that "Saul was sitting at Gibeah, under the tamarisk tree on the height, with his spear in his hand, and all his servants were standing about him" (1 Samuel 22:6). It is also recorded that later, when Saul and his sons were dead, some valiant men of the Hebrews "took their bones and buried them under the tamarisk tree in Jabesh, and fasted seven days" (1 Samuel 31:13).

Balsam trees, which may have been poplars or aspens, are named in connection with the wars between some of the Hebrews and the Philistines. David regarded the wind in the balsam trees as an omen or sign of Yahweh's help. The story says: "And when you hear the sound of marching in the tops of the balsam trees, then bestir yourself; for then the Lord has gone out before you to smite the army of the Philistines" (2 Samuel 5:24).

The original name of the place where Jacob had his famous dream was "Luz." One of the meanings of this word is a nut-bearing shrub or tree, probably an almond or hazel tree. When Jacob awoke from his dream, he said, "Surely the Lord is in this place; and I did not know it" (Genesis 28:16). He was terrified but he "rose early in the morning, and he took the stone which he had put under his head and set it up for a pillar and poured oil on the top of it. He called the name

of that place Bethel; but the name of the city was Luz at the first" (Genesis 28:18, 19).

In the long history of the Hebrews, there is evidence that the veneration of trees and places, although it continued for centuries, gradually diminished. By 745 B.C., we find the prophet Hosea denouncing some of the religious practices of his day, mentioning, among other things, their worship "under oak, poplar, and terebinth" (Hosea 4:13).

After their return from exile (538 B.C.), there were many leaders among the Jews who had found that God is the one God of the whole world and, as well, a God of goodness. For such people these holy places were no longer necessary to the worship of God. Holiness came to have a nobler meaning. Instead of aloofness, it came to mean purity, goodness, and mercy.

A half millennium later we hear Jesus saying, "God is spirit" (John 4:24). Moreover, Paul says, "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God?" (1 Corinthians 6:19). These ideas and experiences of God reveal a very long journey in the comprehension of the Hebrews from the far past when they had worshiped local spirits.

## II

# *Primitive Religion of the Hebrews in Canaan*

AFTER THE HEBREWS conquered Canaan, they gradually made friends with the Canaanites, and married their sons and daughters. They unavoidably gave up the ways of their desert life and drifted into an acceptance of the culture, the law codes, and especially the writing of the Canaanites. In Canaan it became necessary for the Hebrews to learn how to cultivate the land and raise their own food. As they watched the Canaanites hold great ceremonies for their Baals (or gods of fertility) during the times of planting the grain and reaping the harvest, they quite naturally felt that they must do the same in order to be successful farmers. Such fertility ceremonies promised rain and crops. Centuries later, the prophets persuaded the Hebrews to give up these practices.

### *The Hebrews Learn from the Canaanites*

In the stories of Jephthah's daughter (Judges 11) and the vintage festival at Shiloh (Judges 21:19-23) there are features of a fertility cult. Other inroads into the life of the Hebrews were also made by the Canaanite religion (cf. 1 Kings 14:24). We find the names of numerous Canaanite gods and goddesses appearing in the personal names of Hebrews, such as Shamgar the son of Anath (Judges 3:31), Jerubbaal (Judges 7:1), Esh-baal, and Merib-baal (1 Chronicles 8).

In time, agricultural festivals of the Hebrews grew into festivals associated alone with Yahweh (Exodus 23:15; 34:18).

For example, the feast of unleavened bread was linked with the feast of passover. The predecessor of the passover was a spring festival at which the nomad offered the first of his flocks to the deity. Later it became a festival of Israel's deliverance from Egypt by Yahweh (cf. Deuteronomy 16:1-12).

An incident in the life of Gideon illustrates the people's reliance upon Baal and upon Yahweh for agricultural success. Gideon was a farmer who felt that Yahweh could help him against the devastation of the Midianites, of whom we read:

They would encamp against them and destroy the produce of the land, as far as the neighborhood of Gaza, and leave no sustenance in Israel, and no sheep or ox or ass. For they would come up with their cattle and their tents, coming like locusts for number; both they and their camels could not be counted; so that they wasted the land as they came in (Judges 6:4-5).

This devastation of the country seemed to be a sign of punishment for the Hebrews' unfaithfulness to Yahweh. By a magical ceremony Gideon tried to find out about Yahweh's willingness to help him (Judges 6:17-24). Gideon's father had an altar to Baal (cf. Judges 6:25-32). In loyalty to Yahweh, Gideon took ten servants and a bull to that altar of Baal and destroyed it secretly and in terror at night. Then he sacrificed the bull to Yahweh on a new altar.

When the astonished Hebrews found what Gideon had done, they demanded of his father Joash that he be put to death.

Then the men of the town said to Joash, "Bring out your son, that he may die, for he has pulled down the altar of Baal and cut down the Asherah beside it." But Joash said to all who were arrayed against him, "Will you contend for Baal? Or will you defend his cause? Whoever contends for him shall be put to death by morning. If he is a god, let him contend for himself, because his altar has been pulled down" (Judges 6:30-31).

But there was no further word from Baal or his followers. Instead Yahweh manifested his approval through a series of miraculous events and Gideon with an army of only three hundred men captured the Midianite stronghold.

### *Sanctuaries*

A place inhabited by a god was called sacred, meaning "set apart." Such sacred places or homes of the gods were called

sanctuaries and frequently were referred to as high places. To guard the holiness of these places, a wall or line of stones was placed around them. Numerous references are made in the Old Testament to high places:

The people have a sacrifice today on the high place (1 Samuel 9:12b).

The people were sacrificing at the high places, however, because no house had yet been built for the name of the Lord (1 Kings 3:2).

And the man cried against the altar by the word of the Lord, and said, "O altar, altar, thus says the Lord: 'Behold, a son shall be born to the house of David, Josiah by name; and he shall sacrifice upon you the priests of the high places who burn incense upon you, and men's bones shall be burned upon you'" (1 Kings 13:2).

For they also built for themselves high places, and pillars, and Asherim on every high hill and under every green tree . . . (1 Kings 14:23).

For he rebuilt the high places which Hezekiah his father had destroyed; and he erected altars for Baal, and made an Asherah, as Ahab king of Israel had done, and worshiped all the host of heaven, and served them. And he built altars in the house of the Lord, of which the Lord had said, "In Jerusalem will I put my name." And he built altars for all the host of heaven in the two courts of the house of the Lord. And he burned his son as an offering, and practiced soothsaying and augury, and dealt with mediums and with wizards. He did much evil in the sight of the Lord, provoking him to anger. And the graven image of Asherah that he had made he set in the house of which the Lord said to David and to Solomon his son, "In this house, and in Jerusalem, which I have chosen out of all the tribes of Israel, I will put my name for ever . . . (2 Kings 21:3-7).

And he deposed the idolatrous priests whom the kings of Judah had ordained to burn incense in the high places at the cities of Judah and round about Jerusalem; those also who burned incense to Baal, to the sun, and the moon, and the constellations, and all the host of the heavens (2 Kings 23:5).

We read of high places at Gibeon, at Gilgal near Jericho, and at Dan. Every town must have been conveniently near to such a place of sacrifice (cf. 1 Kings 14:23). These high places seem to have been both citadel and shrine.

In the beginning there were probably no altars. Later, the altar became an important part of a high place. Probably an ancient altar consisted of a mere heap of earth, baked clay,

or a pile of stones with a flat stone on the top. In Exodus there is a law about the creation of the altar:

An altar of earth you shall make for me and sacrifice on it your burnt offerings and your peace offerings, your sheep and your oxen; in every place where I cause my name to be remembered I will come to you and bless you. And if you make me an altar of stone, you shall not build it of hewn stones; for if you wield your tool upon it you profane it (Exodus 20:24, 25).

The burnt sacrifices made by people like Gideon were offered on altars (cf. Genesis 8:20 and 12:9).

Today we can see a most impressive great high place at Petra, south of the Dead Sea. It was discovered in 1900. Seven stairways which have been cut out of the red sandstone rock lead up to the top of this mountain where there is an open sanctuary. Here sacrificial feasts were held. A rock altar and a reservoir to supply water were essential at such places of worship. Centuries after the Hebrews had settled in Canaan, the prophet Hosea referred to these rustic places of worship. He cited festive gatherings on new moons and sabbaths, involving sacrifices of sheep, goats, and large cattle, and offerings of grain, wine, oil, flax, wool, figs, and raisin cakes. Such offerings seem to have been made by the priests in charge of the sanctuary or were eaten in picnic fashion by those who came to worship.

Before entering a holy place, the worshiper prepared himself by fasting and by special washing, in order to remove anything from his body which might displease the god. He also removed his garments and his sandals. On entering the sacred place, he covered his head with a cloth or with his hands, so as to avoid the risk of looking at the god. To let the god know that he was coming, he also cried out. Then he danced or marched around the holy stone or tree shouting the name of the god as he went. After this he stood still before it in a reverent attitude. If no harm came to him, he ventured to stroke or to kiss the holy stone.

### *Offerings and Sacrifices*

Following this approach to the god, the worshiper killed a firstborn animal or in the early days even a child. The blood was given to the gods by the act of pouring it on the ground

or upon the holy stone. Blood was the source of life and was sacred (Leviticus 17:11).

Archaeologists have found the bones of human beings, cows, sheep, goats, and deer at one ancient sanctuary. These offerings were made thousands of years ago.

Early people generally brought as offerings those things which were most valuable to them, such as food, for it was believed that this was really the food of the gods. After the sacrifice was completed, the worshiper, in prayer, made promises and asked for the favor and help of the god. If the god granted favor, sometimes the worshiper pronounced curses upon his enemies.

Very long ago, in desert life, the owner of any animal had no right to kill to suit his own pleasure. If it was slain, its life was to be distributed between all the worshiper's relatives and the god of the tribe. No part of the life must be lost. The body of the animal was believed to have life that must be eaten up at once so that it would enter into the worshiper's body.

When a sheep or an ox was brought to the altar, it became the property of the god. The flesh and the fat were burned on an altar because the worshipers believed that the god enjoyed these as his food. In this manner the Hebrews made offerings to the Lord (Genesis 8:20-22). Perhaps there was some idea of feeding the god to keep him alive (cf. Leviticus 21:6, 8, 17). When the god became friends with the community he entered into all its activities and became the enemy of its enemies.

The worshiper ate the meat of the animal at the holy place, believing that the god and himself were joined together physically by eating together. When he was united in this way with the god into one body he expected the help of the god of this particular place.

In later years the blood and fat of the animals were sprinkled or daubed on the worshipers. The people ate the part of the animal where sacred life was believed to be less present. Finally it became the custom to pour the blood out at the altar and to burn the fat, because the blood was very sacred.

The priest from among Aaron's sons, who is anointed to succeed him, shall offer it to the Lord as decreed for ever; the whole of it shall be burned (Leviticus 6:22).

Some offerings were made as expressions of gratitude.

Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and cereal offerings,  
I will not accept them,  
and the peace offerings of your fatted beasts  
I will not look upon (Amos 5:22).

Then the king drew near to the altar, and went up on it, and burned his burnt offering and his cereal offering, and poured his drink offering, and threw the blood of his peace offerings upon the altar (2 Kings 16:12b, 13).

After the Exile it became the custom to give the flesh of the animal to the priests. The offering was considered very holy. For this reason only the priests ate it. Note the following instances in the priestly code:

Every male among the priests may eat of it; it is most holy (Leviticus 6:29).

And every offering, all the holy things of the people of Israel, which they bring to the priest, shall be his; and every man's holy things shall be his; whatever any man gives to the priest shall be his (Numbers 5:9, 10).

Nothing could be left over. The Hebrew law said that what was not eaten on the first or second day must be burned.

And the flesh of the sacrifice of his peace offerings for thanksgiving shall be eaten on the day of his offering; he shall not leave any of it until the morning (Leviticus 7:15).

There were "devoted" offerings of man, beast, garment, or utensil. These devoted offerings were considered sacred or untouchable for any secular use. A thing devoted or vowed became the possession of the god. (cf. Genesis 28:20-22; 31:13). The city of Jericho was vowed to Yahweh (Joshua 6:17 — 7:26). Everything in the city was to be dedicated to God; the profits of victory went to Yahweh. In the story of Saul and Agag (1 Samuel 15:1-33) and in the account of Jephthah killing his own daughter (Judges 11:30-40) we see vows being carried out in all their cruelty.

### *Human Sacrifices*

The early Semitic peoples had the terrible custom of sacrificing children as offerings to their gods. The Old Testament

mentions this in 2 Kings 3:26, 27; 17:17, 31; 21:6. In very special cases adults were offered as a sacrifice to Yahweh (cf. Judges 11:31, 39). Many skeletons of infants have been found by archaeologists. Firstborn children were considered the most sacred gift for the gods (cf. Exodus 13:13; Leviticus 18:21; 2 Kings 16:3; Jeremiah 7:31, 32; Micah 6:7). If a sacrifice was required, it was the firstborn child who was chosen, for this child was thought to be the most sacred one (cf. Genesis 49:3). Some of the very oldest laws of the Hebrews required that the firstborn son be given or redeemed as a sacrifice to Yahweh.

You shall not delay to offer from the fulness of your harvest and from the outflow of your presses. The first-born of your sons you shall give to me (Exodus 22:29).

All the first-born of your sons you shall redeem (Exodus 34:20).

A great prophet and teacher named Jeremiah said that the Hebrews had built high places “to burn their sons and their daughters in the fire; which I [Yahweh] did not command, nor did it come into my mind” (Jeremiah 7:31).

The Bible story of Abraham’s preparing to kill his son, Isaac, as an offering to his god was doubtless told to the later Hebrews to show that Yahweh did *not* desire human sacrifices to be made (cf. Genesis 22:1-17). When the Hebrews offered human sacrifices they probably felt that it was a necessary kind of worship in which they expressed their deep loyalty and devotion by offering their greatest treasures, their sons.

Slowly, they realized Yahweh did not wish them to kill innocent people as offerings. Rams, sheep, and oxen were considered to be a sufficient offering. The dreadful human sacrifices seem to have lasted until the Hebrew leaders were carried away from Palestine to live as exiles in Babylonia in 586 B.C. (cf. 2 Kings 16:3; 21:6; 23:10). Here the reader finds how much the editor of this old history disapproved of the custom of child sacrifice.

In Leviticus we read of a law against child sacrifice created after the Jews were in exile (cf. Leviticus 18:21; 20:2). Probably it was not until after the Jewish exile that it entirely ceased (cf. Jeremiah 7:31; 19:5; Ezekiel 20:25, 26; 2 Kings 3:27).

*The Use of Blood*

Because blood is so essential to life, and the power of life itself is so mysterious, blood became most important to people in times of danger. Death was an example of these dangers. To overcome drought, or the effects of slaying a man or a beast, or to overcome epidemics, blood was used. It was smeared on a tree or poured on its roots to bring rain and stop drought. Blood was used in many forms of worship. The ancient Hebrews had the curious custom of sprinkling the blood of a lamb on their doors and lintels at the Pesach festival (cf. Exodus 12:5, 7, 22).

Then they shall take some of the blood, and put it on the two door-posts and the lintel of the houses in which they eat them (Exodus 12:7).

The Old Testament has many references to the use of blood in elaborate ceremonies of purification. Already we have noticed that the blood of animals was sprinkled on worshipers (cf. Exodus 24:8). Blood was used in the consecration of a priest (cf. Exodus 29:19-21). Blood was "sprinkled" before the sanctuary (cf. Leviticus 4:4-6; Numbers 19:4), or around the altar (cf. Exodus 29:10-12), or on the altar (cf. Exodus 24:6; Leviticus 1:5, 11), or on a burning sacrifice (cf. 2 Kings 16:15).

Among the Semites there seem to have been stern laws or taboos against eating blood.

They struck down the Philistines that day from Michmash to Aijalon. And the people were very faint; the people flew upon the spoil, and took sheep and oxen and calves, and slew them on the ground; and the people ate them with the blood. Then they told Saul, "Behold, the people are sinning against the Lord, by eating with the blood." And he said, "You have dealt treacherously; roll a great stone to me here." And Saul said, "Disperse yourselves among the people, and say to them, 'Let every man bring his ox or his sheep, and slay them here, and eat; and do not sin against the Lord by eating with the blood.'" So every one of the people brought his ox with him that night, and slew them there. And Saul built an altar to the Lord; it was the first altar that he built to the Lord (1 Samuel 14:31-35).

Only you shall not eat the blood; you shall pour it out upon the earth like water. . . . Only be sure that you do not eat the blood; for the blood is the life, and you shall not eat the life with the flesh (Deuteronomy 12:16, 23).

It shall be a perpetual statute throughout your generations, in all your dwelling places, that you eat neither fat nor blood (Leviticus 3:17).

If any man of the house of Israel or of the strangers that sojourn among them eats any blood, I will set my face against that person who eats blood, and will cut him off from among his people. For the life of the flesh is in the blood; and I have given it for you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood that makes atonement by reason of the life. . . . For the life of every creature is the blood of it; therefore I have said to the people of Israel, You shall not eat the blood of any creature, for the life of every creature is its blood; whoever eats it shall be cut off (Leviticus 17:10, 11, 14).

### *Blood Revenge*

Ancient tribal customs, such as blood revenge, survived for a long time among the Hebrews after their settlement in Canaan. Blood revenge was probably a sacrifice to appease the anger of a god when one of his worshipers had been slain. In 2 Samuel 21:1-9, we find King David perplexed because of a famine, and on consulting Yahweh he was told that "There is blood guilt on Saul and on his house, because he put the Gibeonites to death" (2 Samuel 21:1b). When the king summoned the Gibeonites to learn from them what should be done to atone for the sin of Saul (the former king), they said:

The man who consumed us and planned to destroy us, so that we should have no place in all the territory of Israel, let seven of his sons be given to us, so that we may hang them up before the Lord at Gibeon on the mountain of the Lord (2 Samuel 21:5b, 6).

Then King David replied, "I will give them." So we are told that seven sons of Saul were put to death in the early days of the harvest.

When a person committed an act that was considered a sin, such as murder, the Hebrews once believed as did their neighbors that the god where they lived became angry with the whole community. The community was responsible for the sin. The blood of the slain victim cried from the earth unless it was covered by revenge upon the murderer and an appropriate sacrifice to God.

And the Lord said, "What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground" (Genesis 4:10).

For behold, the Lord is coming forth out of his place  
 to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity,  
 and the earth will disclose the blood shed upon her,  
 and will no more cover her slain (Isaiah 26:21).

The community was obliged to discover the offender and to get rid of him. If he was not found, a sacrifice was made to bring peace between the community and its god (cf. Deuteronomy 21:1-9; 19:4-6; Numbers 5:8; 35:12; Joshua 20:2-5, 9). The law was one of blood revenge, as may be seen in the proud bragging of Lamech:

Lamech said to his wives:  
 "Adah and Zillah, hear my voice;  
 you wives of Lamech, hearken to what I say:  
 I have slain a man for wounding me,  
 a young man for striking me.  
 If Cain is avenged sevenfold,  
 truly Lamech seventy-sevenfold" (Genesis 4:23, 24).

Whoever strikes a man so that he dies shall be put to death. But if he did not lie in wait for him, but God let him fall into his hand, then I will appoint for you a place to which he may flee . . . (Exodus 21:12, 13).

Cases of unintentional injuries were gradually provided for by establishing these places of refuge which were certain cities designated as places of asylum.

### *The Use of Images*

We read in Genesis 31:19 of Rachel stealing the "household gods." The Hebrews used images to aid them in their worship just as did other people around them. When Moses led the Hebrews into the worship of Yahweh, we read that he carried a staff which turned into a serpent (cf. Exodus 4:1-4). Probably it was a staff such as he had seen the Egyptians use. When people were ill, Moses set up a shining image of a serpent (cf. Numbers 21:4-9). Apparently the Hebrews kept this kind of image for their worship and burned incense to it for hundreds of years. We read that King Hezekiah (about 720-692 B.C.) removed it from the temple in Jerusalem several hundred years after the Hebrews came into Palestine:

He removed the high places, and broke the pillars, and cut down the Asherah. And he broke in pieces the bronze serpent that Moses had

made, for until those days the people of Israel had burned incense to it; it was called Nehushtan (2 Kings 18:4).

In Judges 17:1-6, we find a man named Micah dedicating a large amount of silver to the Lord and using it to make a carved metal idol in his honor. In this passage we read:

And the man Micah had a shrine, and he made an ephod and teraphim, and installed one of his sons, who became his priest (Judges 17:5).

In the next chapter we are told that scouts from another tribe invaded his country. Learning of his household god, they insisted that their clan should have it and his priest as well.

And they said to him, "Keep quiet, put your hand upon your mouth, and come with us, and be to us a father and a priest. Is it better for you to be priest to the house of one man, or to be priest to a tribe and family in Israel?" And the priest's heart was glad; he took the ephod, and the teraphim, and the graven image, and went in the midst of the people (Judges 18:19-20).

In another story David, one of the greatest Hebrew kings, escaped with his life as his wife Michal substituted for him an image or teraphim, which was so large that it appeared to be David himself in his bed. It deceived his enemies and David escaped (cf. 1 Samuel 19:11-17).

Sacred objects of the Canaanites are often mentioned in references to the destruction of shrines. These objects were stone pillars, the wooden *asherah* which perhaps represented the goddess Asherah, and figures of stone and bronze. Later, some of the Hebrews made expensive images of Yahweh. They were fashioned after those of the Canaanites and represented little bulls.

About 621 B.C., under King Josiah, there was a great reform movement among the Hebrews in which the use of idols was abolished. This prohibition appears in Deuteronomy 7:5; 12:2-4; and 16:21, 22, and the story is told in the following passage from 2 Kings:

And he deposed the idolatrous priests whom the kings of Judah had ordained to burn incense in the high places at the cities of Judah and round about Jerusalem; those also who burned incense to Baal, to the sun, and the moon, and the constellations, and all the host of the heavens. And he brought out the Asherah from the house of the Lord, outside Jerusalem, to the brook Kidron, and burned it at the

brook Kidron, and beat it to dust and cast the dust of it upon the graves of the common people (2 Kings 23:5, 6).

Hosea the prophet had earlier pointed the way to higher religion for his people:

For the children of Israel shall dwell many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or pillar, without ephod or teraphim. Afterward the children of Israel shall return and seek the Lord their God, and David their king; and they shall come in fear to the Lord and to his goodness in the latter days (Hosea 3:4-5).

Hosea revealed the problem of Canaanite influences:

Israel is a luxuriant vine  
that yields its fruit.  
The more his fruit increased  
the more altars he built;  
as his country improved  
he improved his pillars (Hosea 10:1).

In all of these reforms we can see what had been the practices of the Hebrews. In an old record about Jacob by one of the earliest writers (J), we find him setting up stone pillars to mark the spot of his vision of God.

Then Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, "Surely the Lord is in this place; and I did not know it." . . .

So Jacob rose early in the morning, and he took the stone which he had put under his head and set it up for a pillar and poured oil on the top of it. He called the name of that place Bethel; but the name of the city was Luz at the first (Genesis 28:16, 18-19).

We have seen that centuries after their entrance into Canaan, some Hebrew leaders worked to remove the pillars and objects of worship. Some time between 900 and 850 B.C. the J writer commanded the people to demolish their Canaanitish altars, obelisks, and sacred poles.

Take heed to yourself, lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land whither you go, lest it become a snare in the midst of you. You shall tear down their altars, and break their pillars, and cut down their Asherim (for you shall worship no other god, for the Lord, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God), lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land, and when they play the harlot after their gods and sacrifice to their gods and one invites you, you eat of his sacrifice, and you take of their daughters for your sons,

and their daughters play the harlot after their gods and make your sons play the harlot after their gods. "You shall make for yourself no molten gods . . ." (Exodus 34:12-17).

In Judges 3:7-8 we find a condemnation of the worship of sacred poles. The prophet Hosea condemned images too.

And now they sin more and more,  
and make for themselves molten images,  
idols skilfully made of their silver,  
all of them the work of craftsmen.  
Sacrifice to these, they say.  
Men kiss calves! (Hosea 13:2).

We also find a later prophet like Jeremiah most severe in his condemnation of primitive worship.

But where are your gods  
that you made for yourself?  
Let them arise, if they can save you,  
in your time of trouble;  
for as many as your cities  
are your gods, O Judah (Jeremiah 2:28).

At some time the Hebrews had created a law which said "You shall make for yourself no molten gods" (Exodus 34:17). Probably this law merely forbade them to make expensive images of silver or gold. It did not forbid stone or wooden idols.

The climax of the opposition to this primitive and ancient form of worship is shown by the great Second Isaiah, who lived during the time of the exile of the people of Judah in Babylon. He was clearly a worshiper of the one and only God of the universe, the God of all people.

To whom then will you liken God,  
or what likeness compare with him?  
The idol! a workman casts it,  
and a goldsmith overlays it with gold,  
and casts for it silver chains.  
He who is impoverished chooses for an offering  
wood that will not rot;  
he seeks out a skilful craftsman

to set up an image that will not move (Isaiah 40:18-20). All who make idols are nothing, and the things they delight in do not profit; their witnesses neither see nor know, that they may be put to shame. Who fashions a god or casts an image, that is profitable

for nothing? Behold, all his fellows shall be put to shame, and the craftsmen are but men; let them all assemble, let them stand forth, they shall be terrified, they shall be put to shame together. The iron-smith fashions it and works it over the coals; he shapes it with hammers, and forges it with his strong arm; he becomes hungry and his strength fails, he drinks no water and is faint. The carpenter stretches a line, he marks it out with a pencil; he fashions it with planes, and marks it with a compass; he shapes it into the figure of a man, with the beauty of a man, to dwell in a house. He cuts down cedars; or he chooses a holm tree or an oak and lets it grow strong among the trees of the forest; he plants a cedar and the rain nourishes it. Then it becomes fuel for a man; he takes a part of it and warms himself, he kindles a fire and bakes bread; also he makes a god and worships it, he makes it a graven image and falls down before it. Half of it he burns in the fire; over the half he eats flesh, he roasts meat and is satisfied; also he warms himself and says, "Aha, I am warm, I have seen the fire!" And the rest of it he makes into a god, his idol; and falls down to it and worships it; he prays to it and says, "Deliver me, for thou art my god!" (Isaiah 44:9-17).

Have you not known? Have you not heard?  
The Lord is the everlasting God,  
    the Creator of the ends of the earth.  
He does not faint or grow weary,  
    his understanding is unsearchable (Isaiah 40:28).

I am the Lord, that is my name;  
    my glory I give to no other,  
    nor my praise to graven images (Isaiah 42:8).

## 12

# *Arks for the Gods*

ARKS OR BOXES WERE USED FOR THE GODS by some ancient peoples in the days of the early Hebrews. They were well known in Canaan. The Egyptians had a sacred ship for each god and the image of the god was borne in solemn procession up and down the Nile River. In Babylonia, arks or boxes were likewise used to carry the images of the gods in the processions which marched along the streets on great feast days.

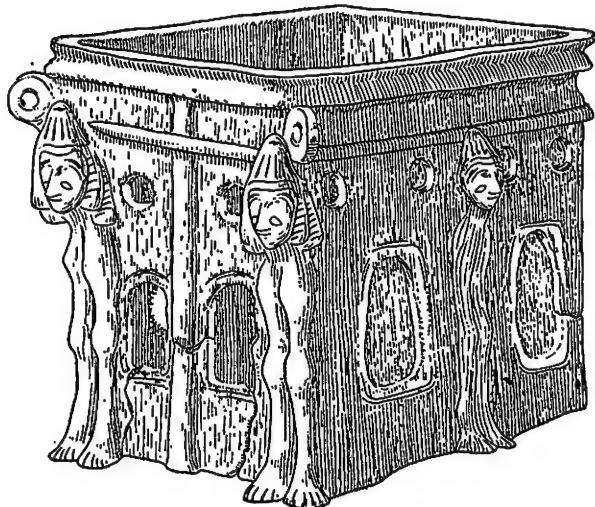
### *The Arks of the Hebrews*

We have already noticed that early Semites considered it necessary to worship the gods of the land wherever they happened to be. At times the gods were carried by the people in boxes or arks. When the Hebrews began to worship Yahweh, therefore, they built an ark or small portable temple in which they believed they could carry him from place to place. This ark, which was small enough that one person could lift it, was also used to help the priest find the guidance of God to decide important questions.

Here are some references to the ark in later times:

And to Abiathar the priest the king said, "Go to Anathoth, to your estate; for you deserve death. But I will not at this time put you to death, because you bore the ark of the Lord God before David my father, and because you shared in all the affliction of my father" (1 Kings 2:26).

And Saul said to Ahijah, "Bring hither the ark of God." For the ark



of God went at that time with the people of Israel. And while Saul was talking to the priest, the tumult in the camp of the Philistines increased more and more; and Saul said to the priest, "Withdraw your hand" (1 Samuel 14:18, 19).

This suggests that it was customary for the priest to put his hand inside the box and do something which after a time indicated an answer to a question which had been asked.

After the Hebrews settled in Palestine, they continued to think that Yahweh spoke to them through the ark. Probably they had arks in their holy places (places of worship). Arks were also kept in the homes of wealthy people who could afford to have their own priest. Judges 17:5 records a story of a man named Micah who had such a chapel in his home.

And the man Micah had a shrine, and he made an ephod and teraphim, and installed one of his sons, who became his priest (Judges 17:5).

One ancient story shows how fearsome an ark could be when it represented the presence of Yahweh.

And when they came to the threshing floor of Nacon, Uzzah put out his hand to the ark of God and took hold of it, for the oxen stumbled. And the anger of the Lord was kindled against Uzzah; and God smote him there because he put forth his hand to the ark; and he died there beside the ark of God. And David was angry because the Lord had broken forth upon Uzzah; and that place is called Perez-uzzah, to

this day. And David was afraid of the Lord that day; and he said, "How can the ark of the Lord come to me?" So David was not willing to take the ark of the Lord into the city of David; but David took it aside to the house of Obed-edom the Gittite (2 Samuel 6: 6-11a).

A few verses later we find David dancing before the ark (2 Samuel 6:14).

### *The Ark in War Times*

In the Bible most of the stories of the ark or box of Yahweh refer to its use in battles. A very old section of the Old Testament says that the ark was carried in front of Moses and the Hebrews after their escape from Egypt, when they were marching.

So they set out from the mount of the Lord three days' journey; and the ark of the covenant of the Lord went before them three days' journey, to seek out a resting place for them. . . .

And whenever the ark set out, Moses said, "Arise, O Lord, and let thy enemies be scattered; and let them that hate thee flee before thee." And when it rested, he said, "Return, O Lord, to the ten thousand thousands of Israel" (Numbers 10:33, 35, 36).

For a great many years after the Hebrews left Sinai they carried the presence of Yahweh in the ark. When they went to battle, they carried it in order to have Yahweh with them. During the wars of Saul and David, an ark was also carried to battle and attended by a priest. One of the arks which was used to carry Yahweh into battle was said to have been taken from a place of worship at Shiloh. It was thought that Yahweh was the god of battle, worth more than many regiments of men. After he had brought victory he was returned to his tent for rest.

There are curious stories about the ark in the Old Testament. One of them is found in 1 Samuel 4-6. Here the Hebrews ascribe their defeat in battle to the capture of the ark by the Philistines. This was a terrible day for the Israelites. Four thousand of their men were killed in battle by their powerful enemies, the Philistines. After the people gathered into the camp, they said, "Why has the Lord put us to rout today before the Philistines? Let us bring the ark of the covenant of the Lord here from Shiloh, that he may come among us and save us from the power of our enemies."

The Hebrews sent down to Shiloh for their ark. When the bearers arrived with it, there went up a great shout from the camp of Israel. The Philistines heard the noise of the shout and asked, "What does this great shouting in the camp of the Hebrews mean?" In the midst of all their fright, a leader of the Philistines cried out, "Take courage, and acquit yourselves like men, O Philistines, lest you become slaves to the Hebrews as they have been to you." Then the Philistines rushed into battle and fought so savagely that the Hebrews began to flee. Thousands were killed, but even worse for the Hebrews, the ark was taken. When news of the disaster reached the camp of the Hebrews they cried out in despair. Eli, one of their aged leaders, was so overcome that he fell from his seat and died. The disastrous defeat of the Hebrews by the Philistines when they captured the ark of Yahweh nearly wiped out the priests who tended the central sanctuary of Shiloh (1050 B.C.).

The Philistines, with great rejoicing, brought the ark to their town of Ashdod and placed it in the temple of their god Dagon. In the morning when the Philistines came to their temple, however, they found Dagon's image had fallen down and broken into pieces. The ancient Hebrew writer of the story believed that in the presence of the mightier Yahweh, Dagon had fallen over and broken.

While the ark was in Philistia, a disease began to spread over the land, and when the men of Ashdod saw what was happening they said, "The ark of the God of Israel must not remain with us; for his hand is heavy upon us and upon Dagon our god."

It was decided to send the ark to Gath, but on its arrival there, a pestilence began to spread in that town. Wherever the Philistines carried the ark, there was disease. Finally the leaders of the Philistines held a meeting and said, "Send away the ark of the God of Israel, and let it return to its own place, that it may not slay us and our people."

So the Philistines prepared a special new cart to carry the ark back to the Hebrews. Their priests and diviners advised them not to send the ark back to the Hebrews empty, for they believed a special gift to the God of the Hebrews might win his favor and take away their diseases.

Beside the ark, in the new cart, they put a similar box con-

taining golden images of mice and tumors. These objects represented the troubles which it was believed Yahweh had brought upon them. How could the Philistines be certain that Yahweh had caused these troubles? This is how they decided. They fastened two cows, which had never been yoked before, to the cart. If the cows took the straight road back to Israel, it was agreed that the God of the ark had caused their afflictions. If the cows chose another road, then it would be considered as merely an accident. The leaders of the Philistines followed the cart. (Perhaps they even chased the cows bearing the ark toward the land of Israel.) The ark was taken safely back to the Hebrews while the Philistines returned home, glad to be freed from this Hebrew God to whom they ascribed all their troubles.

### *The Ark Placed in Solomon's Temple*

More than two hundred years after the Hebrews had come into Canaan, their king Solomon built a Temple at Jerusalem for Yahweh (cf. 1 Kings 6:19). In the Old Testament there is a story about placing the ark in this Temple.

Then Solomon assembled the elders of Israel and all the heads of the tribes, the leaders of the fathers' houses of the people of Israel, before King Solomon in Jerusalem, to bring up the ark of the covenant of the Lord out of the city of David, which is Zion (1 Kings 8:1).

Long, long afterward, Solomon's Temple was destroyed (586 B.C.). By this time, records of the Hebrews had been written. Some of these stories of the arks were included. But there is something very curious about them. They often read as if there had been but one ark. They say that this ark was used as the residence of Yahweh while leading the Hebrews in all their wanderings and in all their battles. In many of the Bible references these writers, whom we call P and D, claim that the ark was made especially to contain two sacred stones with ten laws given by Yahweh. Probably the idea of one ark began to grow in later times because the Hebrews were being taught that there was but one most holy place and that was the Temple of Jerusalem.

### *The Hebrews Change Their Ideas about the Ark*

The superstition of consulting the box of Yahweh seems to

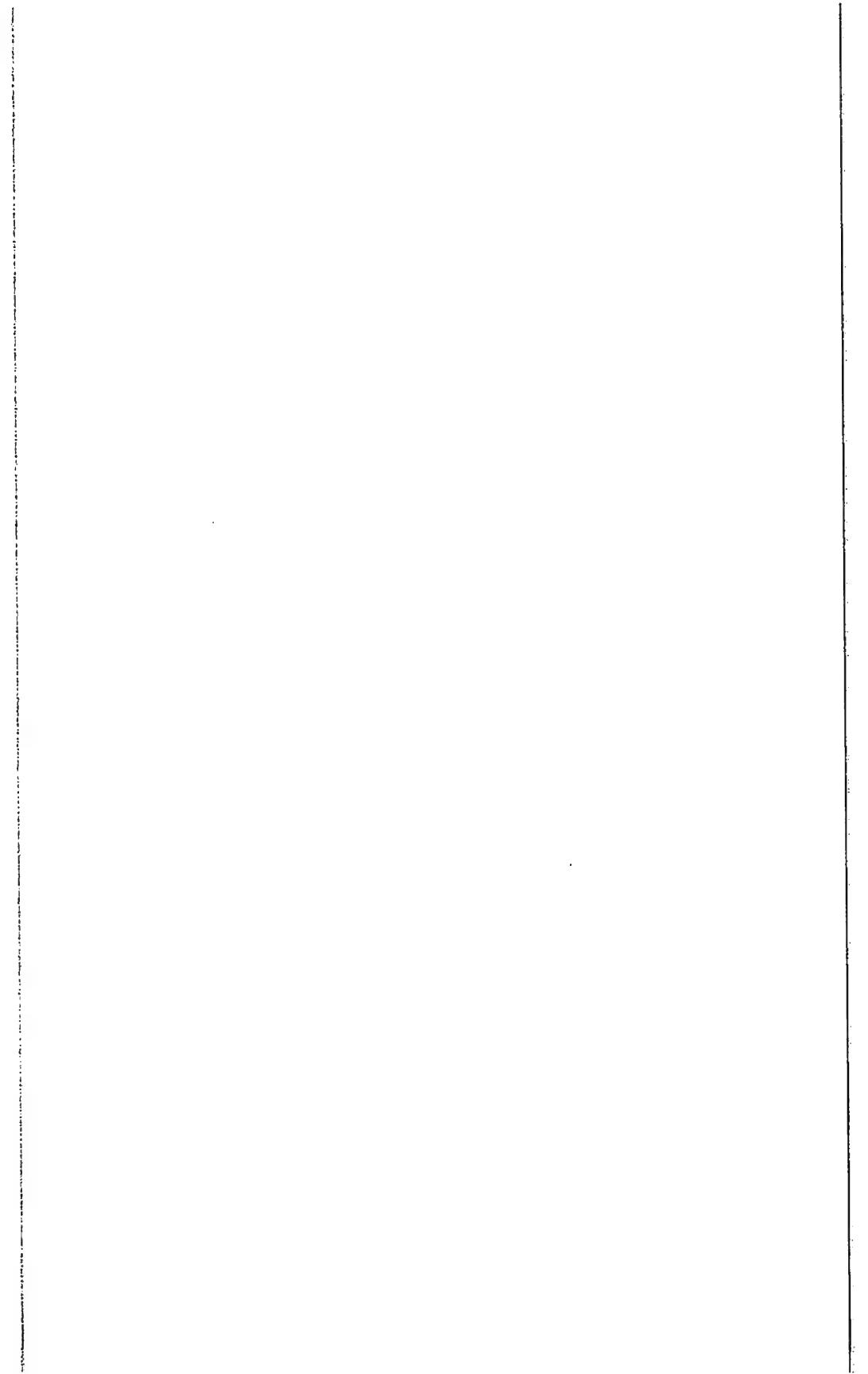
have lasted for many centuries. Even after the Hebrews had been settled in Palestine for several hundred years, we read of the great prophet Jeremiah (about 626 B.C.) trying to persuade people in the north to go to their prophets instead of the arks. He says, "And when you have multiplied and increased in the land, in those days, says the Lord, they shall no more say, 'The ark of the covenant of the Lord.' It shall not come to mind, or be remembered, or missed; it shall not be made again" (Jeremiah 3:16). These words show that the Hebrews had continued to consult the ark for hundreds of years after they had settled in Canaan to find out Yahweh's wishes.

Even to this day people revert to curious practices to find out about the future. Fraud by priests and the superstitions of people ancient and modern keep alive many old practices. The Hebrews were human beings and lived amidst other peoples who used signs, lottery, divination, witchcraft, and sorcery. Faced with specific problems, they used some of these devices to try to get immediate answers. Signs were used to get answers (cf. Judges 6:17-24, 36-40; 1 Samuel 14:8-10; 2 Samuel 5:23-25; 2 Kings 20:8-10). Another way was that of sacred lot (cf. 1 Samuel 10:19-24).

Gradually, however, many of the primitive and superstitious forms accepted by the early Hebrews gave way to nobler ways of seeking the truth and the will of God, just as they must for us in this day. God is near, and all knowledge is ultimately dependent upon him as its Creator.

*IV*

*Under the Rule  
of  
Kings*



*Kings Rule  
the  
Hebrews*

IN CANAAN THE HEBREWS GRADUALLY GAVE UP their desert ways and began to live in cities or cultivate the land as farmers. They built houses instead of tents. Some of those who lived in the city became prosperous, wore rich clothing, and enjoyed luxuries. Of course, other Hebrews lived as farmers or shepherds. The rural Hebrews despised city ways and some, as seen in the book of Amos, condemned luxury as being sinful.

*Saul, the First King*

As time passed, the Hebrews grew stronger and the tribes began to unite. They finally decided to elect their military chieftain, Saul, as a king over all the tribes (about 1020 B.C.). Perhaps it was necessary to unite against the powerful Philistines who controlled all the iron work. Though Saul's kingdom was small, his government was modeled after those of his neighbors. The tribal organization of the Hebrews was kept for a time, while their king was subject to a religious group devoted to Yahweh.

Saul was temperamental, and at times he was weak. He was engaged in much warfare (cf. 1 Samuel 14:47, 48); his great enemy was the Philistine nation, which opposed a Hebrew kingdom. They finally killed some of his sons in the battle of Gilboa and badly wounded Saul (cf. 1 Samuel 31:1-10). There are several stories in 1 Samuel about Saul and the youthful David.

*King David's Rule (1000-970 B.C.)*

The real founder of the Hebrew Empire was David (cf. 2 Samuel 5:1-3). Under him the final conquest of Canaan took place, especially the great stronghold we know as Jerusalem. Jerusalem was a city built upon high hills and for a long time the Hebrews had not been able to capture it from the Canaanites. We read:

And the Lord was with Judah, and he took possession of the hill country, but he could not drive out the inhabitants of the plain, because they had chariots of iron. . . . But the people of Benjamin did not drive out the Jebusites who dwelt in Jerusalem; so the Jebusites have dwelt with the people of Benjamin in Jerusalem to this day (Judges 1:19, 21).

It was David who captured Jerusalem. This place was strong because it was a high location and made the Hebrew kingdom much more powerful.

Nevertheless David took the stronghold of Zion, that is, the city of David (2 Samuel 5:7).

So Jerusalem came to be called the city of David.

David organized his empire around Jerusalem as its capital. Here David's officials of different ranks and kinds became almost slaves of the king. Gradually the old tribal organization weakened, and David's kingdom became the most powerful state ever produced in Palestine. The Hebrew tribes and the Canaanites were now under one ruler.

David cultivated a friendship with his northern neighbor, Hiram of Tyre, and imported his skilled workmen to build a palace in Jerusalem.

And Hiram king of Tyre sent messengers to David, and cedar trees, also carpenters and masons who built David a house (2 Samuel 5:11).

The arts of the Phoenicians began to appear in Hebrew life and the Hebrew people began to take their place among the civilized people of antiquity.

Fascinating stories of David are rehearsed in the books of Samuel. There we see him as a bandit, yet as sparing King Saul's life (cf. 1 Samuel 26:1-25). His stirring poem of friendship for Saul after the latter's death (cf. 2 Samuel 1:17-27), his battles with the Philistines, his wooing of Abigail (1 Samuel

25), and his treacherous killing of Uriah the Hittite (2 Samuel 11, 12) are reported in dramatic fashion.

Under King David, official Hebrew records were presumably started. Such royal records seem to have given some historians of later times much of the material found in 2 Samuel and 1 Kings.

### *The Rule of Solomon*

David was succeeded by his son Solomon, who ruled from about 970-935 B.C. The Hebrew Kingdom took on glamorous ways in material and economic affairs. It resembled neighboring kingdoms. Solomon attempted to bring together the Hebrew people, who were really in two groups, Israel and Judah. The Israelites in the north were agricultural, depending on wheat, olives, and vines; those of Judah in the south were mainly pastoral people living in the highlands suited to the grazing of flocks. Ephraim, as the northern section was sometimes called, was more exposed to the influences of the Canaanites. In Judah the people were more firmly under the power of Yahweh worship. The struggle to unite these tribes or sections led to much conflict.

Solomon tried to ally himself with other peoples around him. He took hundreds of wives and concubines from lands as far as Egypt (cf. 1 Kings 11:3). He also built sanctuaries to the different gods of these many women (cf. 1 Kings 11:5-8). Such practices continued for centuries (cf. 2 Kings 21:3-6).

In Jerusalem he built elaborate palaces (1 Kings 7:8, 12). Beside them he built a private Temple for Yahweh worship. He, like his father David, called on Hiram of Tyre to supply skilled workers as well as wonderful cedar wood (cf. 1 Kings 5-8).

Now Hiram king of Tyre sent his servants to Solomon, when he heard that they had appointed him king in place of his father; for Hiram always loved David. And Solomon sent word to Hiram, ". . . I purpose to build a house for the name of the Lord my God, as the Lord said to David my father, 'Your son, whom I will set upon your throne in your place, shall build the house for my name'" (1 Kings 5:1, 2, 5).

Solomon was building his own house thirteen years, and he finished his entire house.

He built the House of the Forest of Lebanon; its length was

a hundred cubits, and its breadth fifty cubits, and its height thirty cubits, and it was built upon three rows of cedar pillars, with cedar beams upon the pillars (1 Kings 7:1, 2).

### *Solomon's Temple*

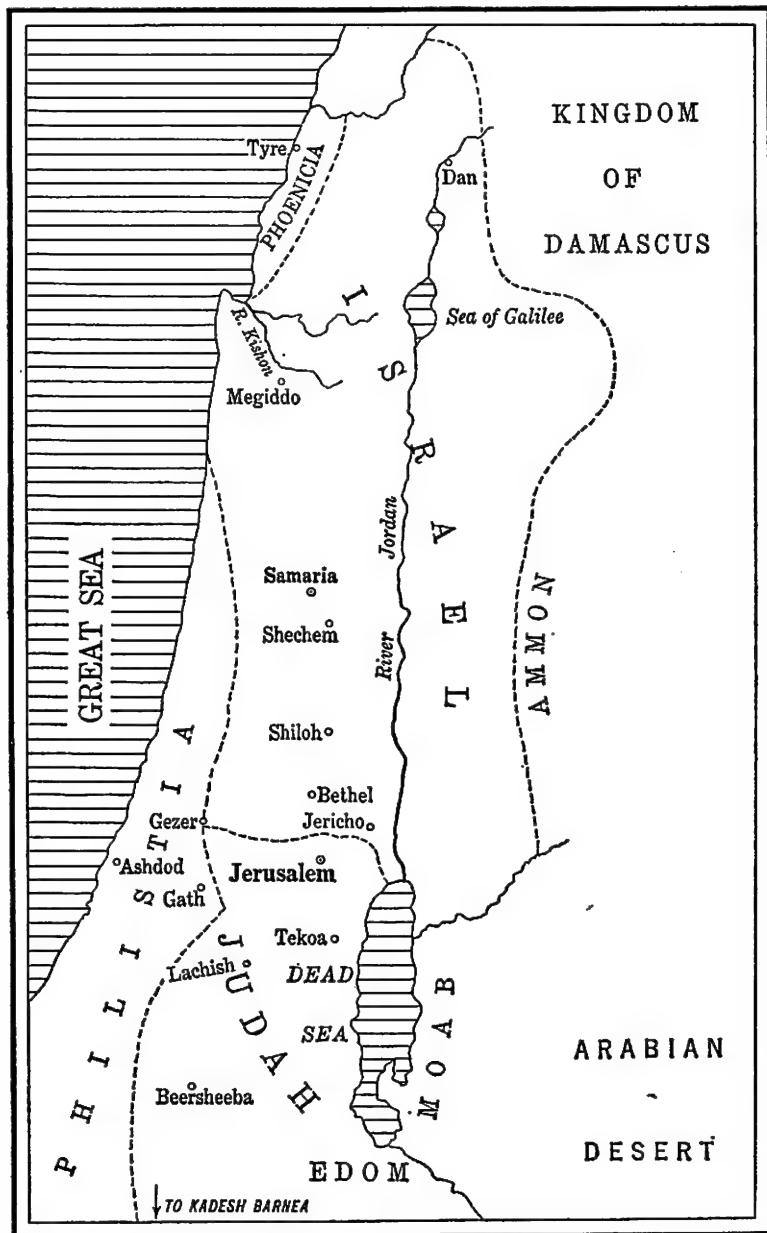
There was a very large rock on top of the mountain at Jerusalem, to which people had come here for centuries to thresh grain. They also came here to worship and to offer sacrifices to Baal on this rock. No one knows for certain how many hundreds or thousands of years this had been done.

Here Solomon built his small Temple or chapel to Yahweh. Gradually the Hebrews began to think that Yahweh dwelt in this Temple at Jerusalem. One writer says the Eternal's "home-fires are within Jerusalem" (Isaiah 31:9, Moffatt). In time, the Temple at Jerusalem would take the place of the other sanctuaries where the Hebrews had worshiped and sacrificed. Solomon's Temple was a royal chapel, used to house the Ark of Yahweh to symbolize Yahweh's protection of the Hebrew ruler. Many of its features were similar to those of Canaanite temples, especially the two great pillars in front called Jachin and Boaz (cf. 1 Kings 7:15), the vast sea, portable lavers, a huge pyramid-like altar, wall decorations, the design of the cherubim (winged sphinxes), bulls, lions, palmettes, and lilies.

The two pillars were about thirty-one feet in height and perhaps decorated with lily-work. On the top of each pillar were a bowl and a network, upon which were two rows of pomegranates (1 Kings 7:41, 42).

There was also a copper-alloy sea (1 Kings 7:23-26) supported by twelve bulls, beasts that were much used in Canaan to symbolize life-giving power. This copper sea appears to have been a portable basin for holy water. It was vast, for it contained about 10,000 gallons. It was like the brim of a cup, in the form of a lily. We can imagine its size: probably about 15 feet in diameter and 7½ feet high (cf. 1 Kings 7:23).

Besides the sea, there was a large altar for burnt offerings (cf. 2 Chronicles 4:1). Solomon may have built this altar in several levels with four "horns" at the lower corners (cf. Ezekiel 43:13-17). Ezekiel made designs for the restoration of this first Temple and the book which bears his name gives some possible clues to the original design.



In front of the altar was a copper platform on which Solomon could stand to pray (cf. 2 Chronicles 6:12-13).

Laymen did not enter this Temple. They could only occupy an area where they could watch the priest sacrifice an animal and put parts of it upon the altar. Only on great ceremonial occasions did the priest enter the Holy Place. Here was an incense altar, tables for the bread of the Presence, and lamp-stands of pure gold (cf. 1 Kings 7:48-49). Daily fresh bread was placed here for each tribe while incense burned as a soothing odor to the Lord.

A few steps higher was the Holy of Holies (cf. 1 Kings 6:16) enclosed by a special screen. Its doors were made of olive wood decorated with carved cherubim, palm trees, and open flowers. Here the ark was set between two sphinxes or cherubim (cf. 1 Kings 8:1 and Isaiah 6:3).

Details about the first Temple are often confused because many of the writings about it in the Old Testament were put into final form after 586 B.C., and are the views of priestly writers of the post-exile time (after 538 B.C.), some hundreds of years after Solomon's reign.

The temple built by Solomon was of Phoenician design with its porch, main room or Holy Place, and Holy of Holies (cf. 1 Kings 5). Here Yahweh was localized. So the problem continued and grew whether Yahweh was local or distant. The temple seemed to make him near. There is a remarkable prayer in 1 Kings 8:22-53 ascribed to Solomon, but perhaps coming from some writer centuries later. In it is a clear rejection of the temple as a dwelling of Yahweh.

But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain thee; how much less this house which I have built! Yet have regard to the prayer of thy servant and to his supplication, O Lord my God, hearkening to the cry and to the prayer which thy servant prays before thee this day; that thy eyes may be open night and day toward this house, the place of which thou hast said, "My name shall be there," that thou mayest hearken to the prayer which thy servant offers toward this place. And hearken thou to the supplication of thy servant and of thy people Israel, when they pray toward this place; yea, hear thou in heaven thy dwelling place; and when thou hearest, forgive (1 Kings 8:27-30).

When the kingdom was split asunder in 933 B.C., a rival shrine was used at Bethel (cf. 1 Kings 12:26-29; Amos 7:13).



Painting on a wall of a tomb at Beni-hasan, Egypt, showing a group of Asiatic (Semitic) people arriving in Egypt and being introduced to the local leader (not shown) by two Egyptian scribes. (From Lepsius, *Denkmaeler*. By permission of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago.)



Black goat-hair tents of Arabs today in the Holy Land.  
(Permission to author by Mr. John Whiting, American Colony of Jerusalem.)

Remains of a Ziggurat or stage-tower at Ur, one of several built between 2113 and 2000 B.C. by the Accadian King Ur-Nammu. This one contained a temple for the moon god Nanna and his consort goddess Ningal. (By permission of Helen M. Edick.)



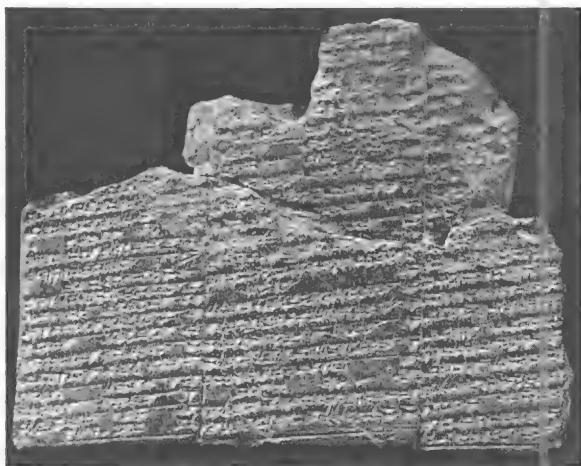


A stone column representing the god Shamash as he gives some famous laws to the Babylonian king, who ruled about 1760 B.C. (By permission of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago.)



Pyramid built by Khufu in Egypt about 2700 B.C. It covers some thirteen acres and is built of more than two million enormous blocks of yellowish limestone. (By permission of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago.)

Ancient Sumerian clay tablet found at Nippur tells some of the story of creation and of a flood in Babylonia. See page 39. (Courtesy of the University of Pennsylvania Museum.)



Egyptian records, beautifully recorded in the interesting picture language called hieroglyphics. Through such records we are able to learn much about the Egypt of three and four thousand years ago.

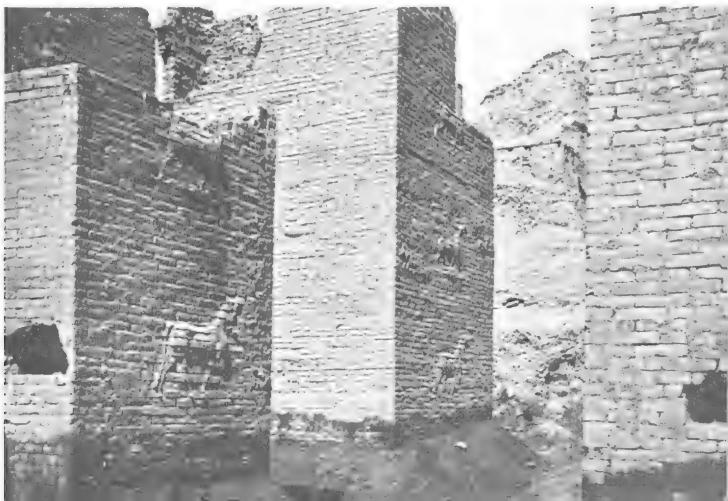


Remains of a 5,000-year-old Ziggurat at Uruk. Beneath it six temples have been found, one above the other, now rising fifty feet above the flat plain. The temple or shrine on the top was for the worship of the sky-god An (Anu). (By permission of Helen M. Edick.)



Moabite Stone set up by King Mesha of Moab, about 840 B.C., to commemorate his victories over Israel (see 2 Kings 3:4). The writing is ancient Hebrew, taken from the Phoenician. (By permission of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago.)

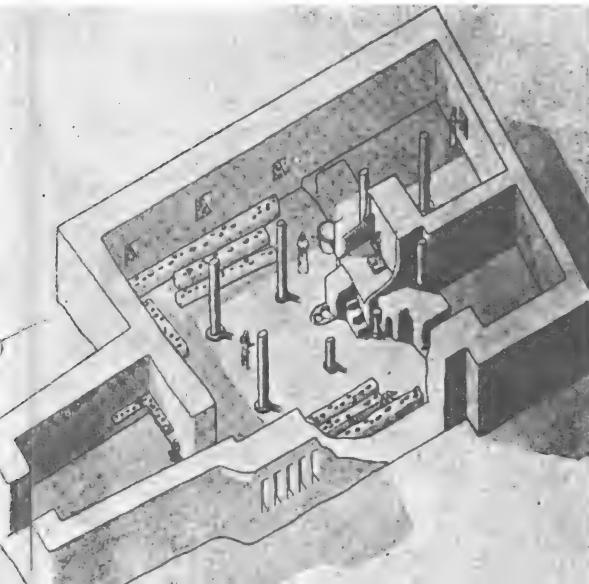
The Ishtar Gate of ancient Babylon, which existed as a city before the Old Testament began. Here the exiles of Judah were taken in 586 B.C. (By permission of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago.)





This scene of brickmaking is taken from a wall painting in the tomb of Rekh-me-Re about 1450 B.C. at Thebes, Dynasty XVIII. (By courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art.)

Model of an ancient Canaanite temple uncovered at Lachish. Directly in front of the altar was a tiny hearth where charcoal remained from the last fire in the hearth nearly three thousand years ago! This temple must have been in use by the Canaanites when the Hebrews were entering Canaan about 1250 B.C. See Joshua 10:31-32. (By permission of the trustees of the late Sir Henry S. Wellcome.)



Giant figure of Rameses II, who may have been the ruler in Egypt when the Hebrews were oppressed while working as slaves in his great building program.





A high place on a sandstone mountain in Petra, south of the Dead Sea in Edom. This may have been one of the high places of worship that the author of Deuteronomy mentioned. (By permission to author by Mr. John Whiting, American Colony of Jerusalem.)

Some Philistines being led by an Egyptian officer as captives. The Philistines lived in Canaan when the Hebrews were struggling to gain possession of the country. (By permission of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago.)



Statuette of a baal, such as the ancient Canaanites worshiped. They believed that a baal helped the crops and vines to grow and yield fruit and helped animals to raise young ones. (By permission of the Journal of Bible and Religion.)





The sacred oak of Mamre, located near Hebron.

eser III, who stands proudly under the symbols of two deities, Ashur and Ishtar. Behind him are Israelites in long robes bringing rich gifts to the Assyrian conqueror (see 2 Kings 10:32). The inscription reads: 'Tribute of Jehu, son of Omri. Silver, gold, a golden bowl, a golden beaker, golden goblets, pitchers of gold, lead, slaves for the hand of the king, javelins, I received from him.' (By permission of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago.)

Greek theater uncovered in Jerash (or Gerasa), east of the Jordan River. It must have been there in Jesus' time and shows the influence of the Greeks in Palestine. (By permission of the American Schools of Oriental Research.)





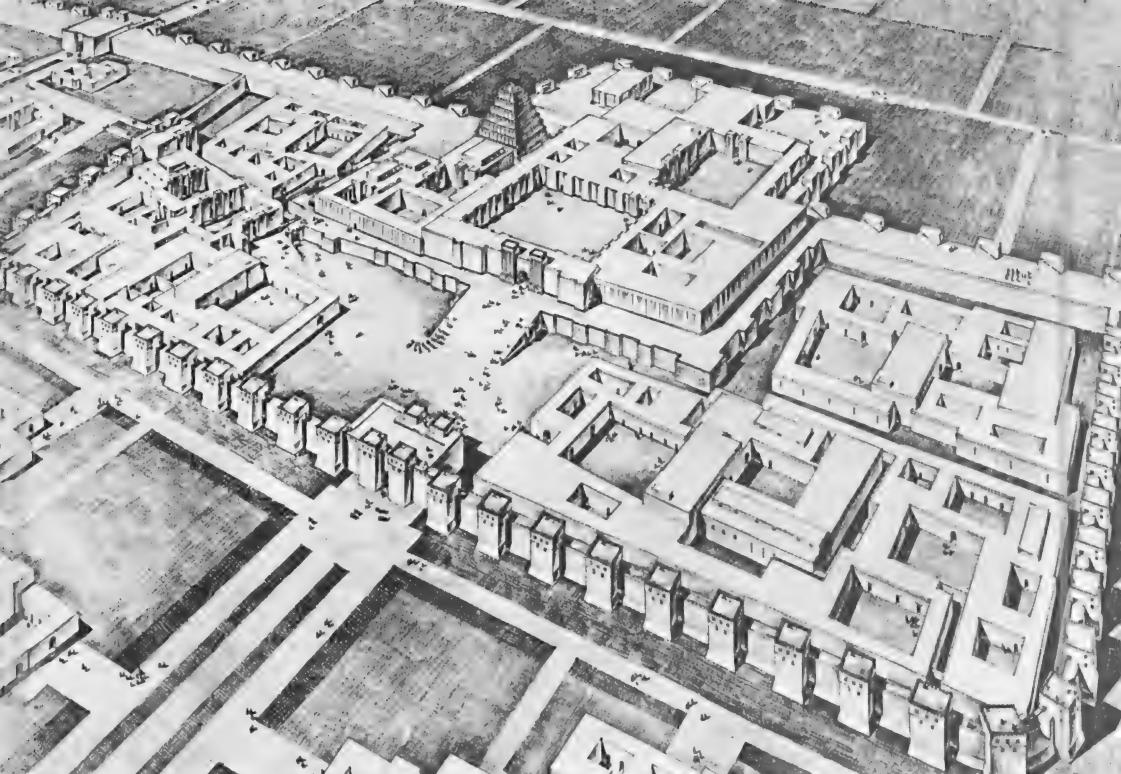
Reconstruction of the Ishtar Gate of Babylon as it probably looked when the Hebrews were led through it as captives in 597 B.C. and in 586 B.C. The gateway was covered with glazed blue tile and adorned with bulls and dragons in brick relief. Through it ran a "procession street" leading to the temple quarter of the city. (By permission of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago.)



"Cylinder of Sennacherib," recording King Sennacherib's invasion of Judah (see 2 Kings 18:14, 17; Isaiah 36:2). The prism or cylinder describes eight campaigns and the building activities of Sennacherib (689 B.C.). (By permission of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago.)

King Darius I of Persia seated on his throne while Xerxes stands behind him. The Temple in Jerusalem is said to have been rebuilt in the sixth year of Darius (Ezra 6:15), or about 515 B.C. The Jews continued to be under the rule of Darius I and his son Xerxes. (By permission of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago.)





Reconstruction of Sargon's palace (705 B.C.), which the Hebrew captives from the Northern Kingdom probably helped to build. Built on a terrace of nearly twenty-six acres, the palace was the dominant feature of the great walled city of Dur Sharrukin or Khorsabad, north of Nineveh, which also contained a temple and large homes for court officials. (By permission of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago.)

Mound under which the ancient city of Lachish lay buried.



In the course of time, in 586 B.C., the splendid Temple in Jerusalem was destroyed and despoiled by Nebuchadnezzar. There, after the return of the Jews from exile, a simpler Temple was built, about 520 B.C. Probably the ceremonies described in Leviticus give us some idea of those used in this later Temple.

The Jerusalem Temple became a center for the keeping and compiling of records and for the education of priests. Here the Old Testament must have been compiled and preserved in later times.

After the exile, Jews in Elephantine in Egypt also built a temple (sixth century B.C.) and another one was built in Leontopolis in the second century B.C. These temples, however, never became as significant as the Temple in Jerusalem. Josiah (621 B.C.) tried to stamp out pagan worship at local shrines and high places by making the Jerusalem Temple central. This created a void for local people until the synagogue as a place of assembly for the Jews of a community came into being.

### *Solomon's Rule*

The expansion and luxury of Solomon's rule is evident in many ways. Scholars have found some of the ruins of his stables for his hundreds of horses and many chariots, particularly at Megiddo (cf. 1 Kings 4:26; 9:15-19; 10:26). Solomon rebuilt many cities, besides Jerusalem (cf. 1 Kings 9:15-21).

Much evidence has been found of Solomon's copper mining activity near Ezion-geber on the Gulf of Aqabah. With the aid of King Hiram of Tyre, he built a fleet of ships for trade on the Red Sea (cf. 1 Kings 9:27-28; 2 Chronicles 9:10). His naval expeditions seem to have been around Arabia and East Africa, largely to import precious stones, gold, ivory, and frankincense. In his time the camel became domesticated and most useful for desert travel and trade. We know of trade under Solomon reaching as far as Palmyra (Tadmor) near the upper Euphrates River. His kingdom and power extended over the Moabites, the Ammonites, the Edomites, and the Syrians.

Solomon's lavish expenditures and the extension of his kingdom into a small empire brought great burdens to the people of his land, who had to pay heavy taxes and were called upon to do much building.

The tragedies in his family are vividly described in 2 Sam-

uel 9-20 and 1 Kings 1-2. These candid records reveal much that is primitive and barbarous about the times.

### *The Division of the Kingdom*

So it came about after Solomon's death, that conflict and division developed between the northern Hebrews (Israel) and the southern Hebrews (Judah) in the year 933 B.C. Solomon's son Rehoboam had lived in royal fashion; he was pampered and spoiled. The result was great opposition to him by the northern tribes as the successor to Solomon. They demanded some relief from the burdens imposed by Solomon. Misjudging these people, Rehoboam rejected their demands and threatened them with heavier loads (cf. 1 Kings 12:1-20). So the northern people broke away from the United Kingdom sometime between 933 and 922 B.C. This Northern Kingdom became known as Israel or Samaria and chose another king, Jeroboam (cf. 1 Kings 12:25-33).

Only Judah remained loyal to Rehoboam. It was the smaller and poorer of the two new states. Both kingdoms became involved in struggles with other nations around them. Until Syria fell, there was much warfare among these three kingdoms. The many wars which Israel and Judah waged against their neighbors contributed greatly to the eventual downfall of these two small nations.

In the Northern Kingdom there continued to be local shrines or high places with their own priests. When Jeroboam became king he set up two centers, one at Bethel (an old Canaanite shrine) and one at Dan. Bull images were set up and were claimed to have been brought by the Hebrews out of Egypt. Jeroboam claimed that they were the gods who had brought the Hebrews out of the land of Egypt (cf. 1 Kings 12:28).

When Omri (c. 876-869 B.C.) became king (cf. 1 Kings 16:22), he built a new capital at Samaria (cf. 1 Kings 16:24). There remained much Canaanitish religion among the northern people. Prophets like Amos and Hosea were critical of the worship, the lives of the people and their luxuries, and of Canaanitish influences.

In recent times archaeologists have dug up the ruins of the palaces of Israel's kings, especially those of Omri and Ahab, and have found much carved ivory used to decorate the walls

and the furniture. Hundreds of pieces were found with designs of lotus, palmettes, sphinxes, and animals, dating about 842 B.C. (cf. Amos 6:4-6; 1 Kings 22:39). They reveal some of the reasons for Amos' criticism of Israel's religion and life.

Because of Solomon's policies and extravagances, the rich people had grown richer and the poor became poorer. The rich oppressed the poor and the two classes grew farther apart (cf. Amos 8:4-6). The extravagance of the rich is shown in Amos 6:4-7. Prophets like Amos and Hosea declared that such an unjust and corrupt society would come to ruin and destruction.

### *The End of the Northern Kingdom*

After a little over two centuries (722 B.C.) division made it easy for the powerful ruler Sargon II of Assyria to conquer the Northern Kingdom and carry away many of the Israelite leaders. Sargon II besieged the city of Samaria for three years and devastated the land. He records taking 27,290 Israelites into exile. These people were lost to the world as a distinct group (cf. 2 Kings 17:1-18). New people were settled in their land and in time they mingled with the northern Hebrews who had remained. Their descendants are known to us as Samaritans; a few remain there today. We read of them in the time of Jesus in the New Testament.

Their complete and final separation from Judah (in later centuries) left them with only the first five books of the Old Testament, for the others had not yet been written. These comprise the Samaritan Bible even today. They built their temple on Mount Gerizim. Notice the conversation of Jesus with a Samaritan woman who asked whether one should worship God at Gerizim or at Jerusalem.

The woman said to him, "Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet. Our fathers worshiped on this mountain; and you say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship." Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for such the Father seeks to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth" (John 4:19-24).

*Judah*

Judah was the smaller of the two nations and had less warfare than Israel. Under the rule of Uzziah (about 783-742 B.C.), Judah expanded her commerce and prospered. When Samaria fell (722 B.C.) to the Assyrians, however, it meant that Judah's independence was also threatened.

Judah under King Ahaz (about 735-715 B.C.) paid tribute to Tiglath-pileser. King Hezekiah (about 715-686 B.C.) may have tried to become independent of Assyria, but he was forced to continue paying tribute by the ruler Sennacherib. According to Sennacherib's own records, he declared that he captured forty-six towns in Judah and Philistia (cf. 2 Kings 18, 19). During his invasion he made his headquarters at the ancient southern city of Lachish (701 B.C.). From here he sent his emissaries to negotiate with King Hezekiah in Jerusalem.

In more recent times, an English archaeologist, Austin Henry Layard, found on the ruined walls of Sennacherib's palace in Nineveh with its seventy-one rooms nearly two miles of sculpture with records of his conquests in Judah. The prize city recorded here was Lachish. One scene shows the king on his throne receiving the booty taken at Lachish.

Sennacherib records his booty from Jerusalem: "I . . . took . . . two hundred thousand, one hundred fifty people, small and great, male and female; horses, mules, asses, camels, large cattle, small cattle, without number. I brought forth . . . thirty talents of gold, and 800 talents of silver . . . precious stones . . . couches of ivory . . . an immense treasure."<sup>1</sup>

The height of Assyrian power was under Esarhaddon and Asshurbanapal during the rule of Manasseh (about 687 to 642 B.C.) over Judah. By paying tribute Judah achieved reasonable peace. But this was not to last.

A disaster was in the making. In 626 B.C. Babylon made itself independent of Assyria. In 612 B.C. the Babylonians united with the Medes and the Scythians and captured the Assyrian capital of Nineveh. For a time the Assyrians ruled from Haran until their power was broken in 605 B.C. at the battle of Carchemish. The joy of the Hebrews on the fall of Assyria is reflected in parts of the book of Nahum.

<sup>1</sup> Taylor Prism of Sennacherib, column 1, 19 ff.

The Judean reformer King Josiah (grandson of Manasseh) tried to gain independence from tribute to Assyria. He went to battle to oppose Pharaoh Neco of Egypt, who was an ally of Assyria. Josiah, however, was killed in the battle (609 B.C.) of Megiddo.

After this time came many changes, in quick succession, of the rulers of Judah during conflicts with Egypt and Babylon. Finally in 598 B.C. King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon invaded the little land of Judah with his armies. He captured the king, as well as many noblemen and skilled workmen, and deported them to Babylon (cf. 2 Kings 24:10-17).

The prophet Jeremiah worked feverishly to persuade the Judeans to submit to the powerful Babylon as the only hope for their survival, but the Judean rulers and leaders did not heed him. Consequently, Nebuchadnezzar decided to end his troubles with Judah once for all. His armies came again and devastated Jerusalem (cf. 2 Kings 24:8-17) so severely that many towns remained in ruins for centuries. The siege lasted for a year and a half.

### *Chart 2. Order of Events in the Hebrew Story*

970-722 B.C. King Solomon built a temple for Yahweh, probably as a chapel for his own large family and officials in Jerusalem. The Hebrews continued to worship throughout the land. Hebrew records were kept under the kings.

950-850 B.C. An unknown writer (J) wrote the first account of the Hebrews. This was later blended with a second story about 750 B.C. by a writer known as E. Portions of each were later combined by priestly writers (P) to create the Pentateuch (first five books of the Old Testament).

933 B.C. After Solomon, a conflict between the northern and southern Hebrews in 933 B.C. led to the creation of two kingdoms, each with its own king.

770-700 B.C. The Northern Kingdom (Israel) had a conflict with the Assyrians, and most of their people were carried away into captivity in 722 B.C. The remaining people became known as the Samaritans.

c. 750 B.C. The E writer, who lived in the Northern Kingdom, wrote an account of the Hebrews. During the same period the prophets were important spokesmen for God: Amos (750 B.C.); Hosea (745 B.C.); Isaiah (770-700 B.C.).

722-586 B.C. Jeremiah spoke and wrote (626-586 B.C.). He sharply condemned idolatrous practices (cf. Jeremiah 7:22, 31; 16:19, 20; 19:5). The J and E books were combined about 650 B.C. A drastic new view of religion for the Hebrews was written by a writer of portions of Deuteronomy (called D) about 621 B.C. He urged the destruction of all high places. 1 and 2 Kings cover nearly 400 years of rulers of Ephraim and Judah and show the viewpoint of the D editor.

*Yahweh, the God  
of the  
Hebrews*

THE RELATION OF THE HEBREWS TO YAHWEH had been so impressive that they were filled with particular awe and reverence toward him. When the Old Testament was translated into Greek in the city of Alexandria (285-246 B.C.), the Jewish writers changed the word "Yahweh" (God) to the word "Lord" (Greek *Kurios*). These translators did not like references to God in human or anthropomorphic terms, so they also changed such references as "the hand of God" to the "power of God" and "his robe" to "his glory." An ancient legend tells that the Hebrews were so overjoyed after their escape from Egypt that they pledged themselves to become Yahweh's faithful and devoted worshipers.

Originally Yahweh seemed to the Hebrews to dwell on a mountain in the area of Midian. They associated him with storm, lightning, and thunder, the rider in the heavens (Psalm 68:33; Deuteronomy 33:26), or riding on a swift cloud (Isaiah 19:1). In Canaan, viewpoints about Yahweh were affected by ideas associated with Baal, such as the arrows, spears, and battles. Some ideas of Yahweh are vividly shown in Habakkuk 3:3-6, 11, 14.

The sun and moon stood still in their habitation  
at the light of thine arrows as they sped,  
at the flash of thy glittering spear (Habakkuk 3:11).

Doubtless the Hebrew refugees from Egypt brought Yahweh

worship to other Hebrew tribes which were already long established in Canaan. It must have taken time before such people became completely devoted to Yahweh and to him alone; yet it seems as if a certain degree of acceptance of Yahweh worship was soon underway in Canaan. Nevertheless it took generations to eliminate pagan practices and to come nearer to a truer understanding of God.

Probably it was a long time after they had come to Canaan that there was a law demanding that the Hebrews worship Yahweh alone (see Exodus 19:1 – 20:8). Though some people believed in other gods, the Hebrews saw that they must give their loyalty and devotion only to him.

#### *Yahweh's Powers Increase*

In time, certain Hebrews began to think of Yahweh as doing things formerly associated with the Baal of Canaan. In place of Baal, Yahweh came to be worshiped as the god of the weather and of the crops. Great harvest festivals were no longer celebrated in honor of Baal but in remembrance of Yahweh. Old customs and ways of celebrating the festivals of sowing and reaping among the Canaanites remained much as they always had, but the Hebrews gave them new meaning and changed them to the glory and honor of Yahweh. The ancient Passover feast of the desert days continued to be celebrated as the birth time of animals. In time, the Hebrews observed this festival to honor Yahweh. When the first of the barley crop was gathered, the first grain was offered to Yahweh as a gift in the form of unleavened bread (Exodus 23:15 and 34:18). Seven weeks later, the people celebrated a new agricultural festival at the time of the ripening of the wheat (Exodus 23:16 and 34:22). In the autumn, there was a festival of grape-gathering, instead of the date festival of desert days. This third festival was a celebration of all of the harvest. Like the others it finally came to be connected with Yahweh as the God of life and growth (cf. Judges 21:19). On the occasion of festivals or feasts the Hebrew men of Canaan were expected to journey to one of the important national places of worship such as Shiloh, Bethel, Dan, or Jerusalem (cf. Exodus 23:17).

When the Israelites in Canaan accepted Yahweh as the power over nature, he came to be worshiped as the Creator of

man and beast. He was the Maker of the earth and sky. The sun, moon, and stars obeyed his command. He appeared in storm, lightning, fire, and earthquake when he went forth to help the Hebrews (cf. Judges 5:4; 1 Samuel 12:17; Psalm 18). After the Hebrews had lived in Palestine for several hundred years, some of their leaders began to say that Yahweh did not wish to be called Baal.

"And in that day," says the Lord, "you will call me, 'My husband,' and no longer will you call me 'My Baal'" (Hosea 2:16).

The Phoenicians used *adon* or *adonai* for "lord" or "my lord." When the Hebrews rejected the Baal of Canaan for Yahweh, therefore, they adopted the word *Adon* or *Adonai* for Yahweh. In the Hebrew-language Old Testament, this word may be seen in Exodus 23:17; 34:23; Isaiah 1:24; 3:1; 10:16; 19:4. It is usually translated into English as "Lord." After their exile, the Jews stopped using the name "Yahweh" altogether and used only the newer term, for they considered the name of God was too sacred to utter.

There came a day when the Hebrews thought that Yahweh could be found and worshiped only in their land of Canaan. (Yet once they had thought he lived only in the mountain at Sinai.) For instance, an interesting story tells us that when Naaman of Damascus wanted to worship Yahweh in his own city, he requested that Elisha give him two mule-loads of earth from Canaan to carry home with him to Damascus.

Then Naaman said, ". . . let there be given to your servant two mules' burden of earth; for henceforth your servant will not offer burnt offering or sacrifice to any god but the Lord" (2 Kings 5:17).

Another old story also shows that some people thought Yahweh dwelt only in Canaan. After Sargon II, king of Assyria, had taken over the land of Israel, he sent some foreign people to live there (cf. 2 Kings 17:24-29). Probably when they came, they continued to worship their own gods. Then, one day, they were terrified when some of them were attacked by fierce lions and several people were killed. Immediately they thought that they must have offended the god of the land, the God of the Hebrews; perhaps he was angry with them because they were not worshiping him. When they reported their misfortunes to the king of Assyria, he sent for a Hebrew priest to

come and teach them about Yahweh so that he might also protect these foreigners in Canaan.

### *A Prophet Criticizes the King*

The great King Omri of Israel (c. 876-869 B.C.) married his son Ahab to the princess Jezebel of the city of Tyre. When Ahab became king of Israel and reigned c. 869-850 B.C., as a great favor to his queen he built for her a temple in Samaria to worship her god Melkart (a name related to Baal, cf. 1 Kings 16:31-33). This provoked one of the greatest crises in Yahweh worship. The worship of Baal Melkart displeased the more rural Hebrews, particularly Elijah. He was a man of the desert and he believed strongly in desert ways. He talked of Yahweh as a stern god who despised the luxuries of the city people and of their king Ahab who lived in luxury. Elijah spoke as a messenger of Yahweh. This ancient story says that he went boldly to the palace and condemned King Ahab for bringing in such luxury, and particularly for permitting the worship of the god Melkart.

Another old and interesting story has been handed down of Elijah in 1 Kings 18:21-46. It indicates the way in which some of the Hebrews were beginning to think of Yahweh as the god of all Palestine. Perhaps it was Elijah who helped this belief to spread among the Hebrews. The story says that there was a terrible drought in the land of Canaan. Farmers were anxious for rain. Probably the Hebrews and the Canaanites had tried to persuade Baal to send rain. Elijah believed that Yahweh was the god of rain, and he wanted to prove it to his people. So he challenged the worshipers of Melkart to meet at Mount Carmel on the boundary line dividing the land of Yahweh and the land of Melkart. In this way it came about that worshipers of Melkart and of Yahweh gathered to make a sacrifice to prove which god could control the weather.

Elijah said, "If the Lord is God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him" (1 Kings 18:21). He ordered two animals to be slain and placed on an altar on top of some wood without any fire. Then he said, "You call on the name of your god and I will call on the name of the Lord; and the God who answers by fire, he is God" (1 Kings 18:24). So it was agreed.

First the Melkart worshipers prepared their offering. Then

they cried out to him to send fire. They did this for half a day and no fire came. As they continued, they cut themselves with knives. They danced about the altar. But the story says there was no answer.

When the worshipers of Melkart had tried in vain, Elijah took his turn. He prepared the altar for Yahweh with twelve pillars of stone. He even poured water over the offering and on the wood. Then he prayed, "O Lord, God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, let it be known this day that thou art God in Israel" (1 Kings 18:36).

The story says after his prayer was finished, fire fell and burned up the animal, and the wood, and the stones, and all the water. When the people saw this they fell on their faces and cried out, "The Lord, he is God; the Lord, he is God" (1 Kings 18:39).

After Elijah had finished his sacrifice, he ordered the Hebrews to kill all the leaders who worshiped Baal Melkart. The story ends by saying that clouds began to gather over the mountain, the wind came, and there followed a great rain which ended the drought. Elijah, of course, believed the drought had been sent by Yahweh to punish those who had not been faithful to Yahweh.

This ancient story was told by the Hebrews over and over again in later days, when they had learned to think that Yahweh was the God of Canaan. It served as a sermon or lesson to them that Yahweh alone was the Hebrew God of Canaan and that he only should be worshiped by them. Today the story shows us how much more the Hebrews at that time still had to learn before they could think of God as the God of all people and as a God of love. Baal worship, however, was not completely destroyed by Elijah, for we read a few years later of the ruler, Jehu, inviting all worshipers of Baal to their place of worship and then cruelly killing them and completely destroying the temple in which they worshiped (2 Kings 10:18ff.).

### *Worship in Shechem*

There are several stories in the Old Testament of ancient altars of the Canaanites at which the Hebrews worshiped Canaanitish gods.

As soon as Gideon died, the people of Israel turned again and played the harlot after the Baals, and made Baal-berith their god (Judges 8:33).

And the people of Israel again did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, and served the Baals and the Ashtaroth, the gods of Syria, the gods of Sidon, the gods of Moab, the gods of the Ammonites, and the gods of the Philistines; and they forsook the Lord, and did not serve him (Judges 10:6).

At an old sanctuary in Shechem,<sup>1</sup> the god was called Baal-berith or El-berith (cf. Judges 9:4).

When all the people of the Tower of Shechem heard of it, they entered the stronghold of the house of El-berith (Judges 9:46).

After the Hebrews had lived in Canaan for a few hundred years, some of them at Shechem had changed completely to the worship of Yahweh instead of Baal-berith. Then, as years passed by, people tried to explain why there was a Hebrew altar in Shechem. They said that Yahweh had appeared to Abraham beside a sacred tree near Moreh (cf. Genesis 12:6-7). Gradually they had forgotten about the Baal of the Canaanites and remembered only Yahweh. In another story we are told that Jacob bought a piece of land at Shechem and "erected an altar and called it El-Elohe-Israel" (Genesis 33:18-20).

### *Worship at Bethel*

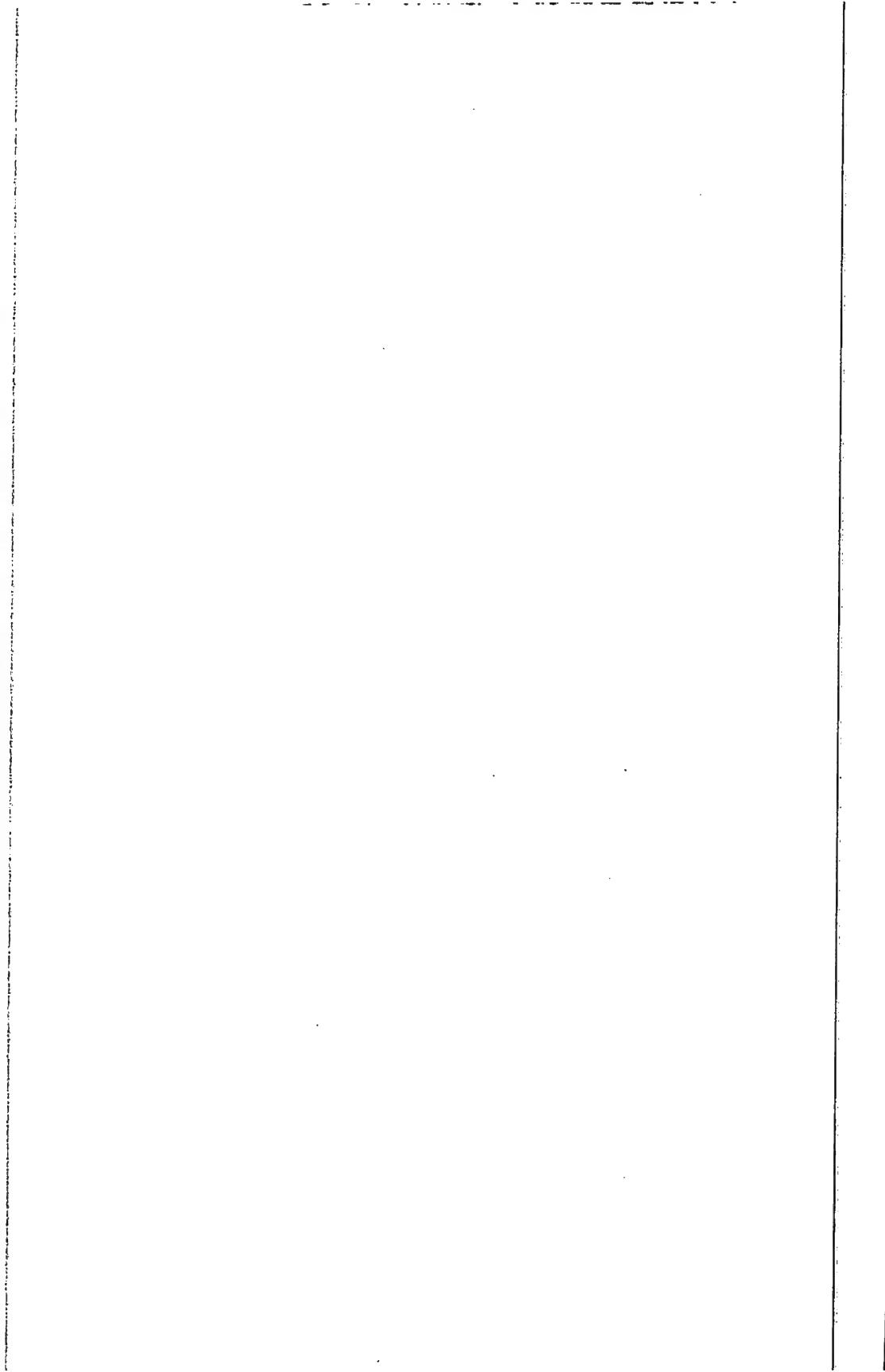
At Bethel the Canaanites worshiped a spirit, probably because at that spot there were many stones worn into curious shapes by the weather. Here the Hebrews came to worship Baal much as the Canaanites did. But as time passed they changed to the worship of Yahweh, just as they had changed at Shechem. When they had forgotten about the worship of the Canaanite spirit and Bethel had become a sacred place for Yahweh, a popular story grew up about God's visiting a Hebrew named Jacob in a dream. In this story, we find Jacob dreaming about angels coming down a ladder from heaven. This vision led him to think that this was a holy place. So he set up the stone upon which he had slept and said, "This

<sup>1</sup> See C. Ernest Wright, *Shechem, The Biography of a Biblical City* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1964). A series of Canaanite temples have been uncovered here.

stone, which I have set up for a pillar, shall be God's house" (Genesis 28:22; cf. 35:1-4). Here we see the Hebrew writer explaining to his people why Bethel had become a sacred place and why its name was changed from Luz to Bethel (house of El).

Stories are also told of Abraham camping at Bethel (perhaps after 1900 B.C.) and setting up an altar. Recently an archaeologist has announced the discovery of an ancient temple at Bethel with evidences of the blood of animal sacrifice on its white limestone altar. He says this temple is about 4500 years old. Pottery has been found dating back to 2000 B.C., making clear that Bethel's early history was Canaanite. The peak of its culture was perhaps when the Hyksos had come into Canaan and Egypt between 1750 and 1550 B.C. An old city wall has been dug up and is dated in the sixteenth century B.C. In the thirteenth century a terrible fire and destruction came, perhaps due to the Hebrew invasion under Joshua. Bethel grew again into a better city under David's reign.

Bethel is mentioned very often in the Old Testament. It was more important as a religious center than Jerusalem, and when the Kingdom was divided, Bethel became the center of worship for the Northern Kingdom. When the Deuteronomic writers urged that Jerusalem alone be made the center for Yahweh worship, we read that Bethel was to be demolished by King Josiah (cf. 2 Kings 23:15, 19-20).



# 15

## *God Speaks Through the Prophets*

AMOS, THE STERN SHEPHERD OF TEKOA, was one of the first great prophets who said that the Hebrews should worship only Yahweh. Amos, who had always lived outdoors on the hills near Jerusalem, believed in living as the Hebrews had lived in the long past. He disliked the ways of city people and felt that all of their grand clothing, houses, and parties were displeasing to Yahweh. More than this, he said that Yahweh did not care for their offerings and religious ceremonies.

### *Amos Criticizes the Worshipers at Bethel*

At Bethel, the royal shrine and the center of worship in the Northern Kingdom (cf. Amos 7:13), King Jeroboam had set up a small golden bull to represent Yahweh, who had brought the Joseph tribe of the Hebrews out of Egypt (cf. 1 Kings 12:28). We can imagine a scene in Bethel during a great religious feast, when Amos appeared in his rough peasant costume and began to condemn the Israelites who had gathered to worship Yahweh at the Temple, about 750 B.C. Amos would begin by cursing the evils of these Israelitish worshipers. To these devotees of Yahweh, such curses were terrifying and dangerous. In the oldest form of Amos' message he cursed the ones who:

turn good worship into mockery  
fight against the loyal  
take bribes

desire the day of the Lord  
 are comfortable in Zion  
 are confident in Mount Samaria  
 put off an evil day  
 lie on ivory beds  
 sprawl on couches  
 eat lambs and calves  
 strum on musical instruments  
 drink wine

Prophets like Amos felt moved to speak in the name of Yahweh in times of crises:

Surely the Lord God does nothing,  
 without revealing his secret  
 to his servants the prophets. . . .  
 The Lord God has spoken;  
 who can but prophesy? (Amos 3:7, 8b).

Amos was shocked by the injustice and cruelty to the poor and the great extravagance of the rich men and women (cf. Amos 2:6-7; 4:1, 2; 5:7-12). Unlike his own simple, stern life on the hills of Judah, he saw luxury and injustice in this market city and shrine center. Men were even being sold as slaves to pay the little they owed for a pair of sandals. There was cheating in weights and measures.

Hear this, you who trample upon the needy,  
 and bring the poor of the land to an end,  
 saying, "When will the new moon be over,  
 that we may sell grain?  
 And the sabbath,  
 that we may offer wheat for sale,  
 that we may make the ephah small and the shekel great,  
 and deal deceitfully with false balances,  
 that we may buy the poor for silver  
 and the needy for a pair of sandals,  
 and sell the refuse of the wheat?" (Amos 8:4-6).

Much immorality was carried on in the name of Yahweh. Some of it was a part of the old Canaanite religion which was practiced in many parts of Canaan and in their old city of Bethel (cf. 1 Kings 14:23, 24; 22:43, 46; Hosea 4:14; Deuteronomy 23:17-18; 2 Kings 23:1-8). Amos lashed out in a harsh voice to the Israelites for their wickedness. He spared no one, not even the women. They lived in palaces and re-

clined on gorgeous couches inlaid with hand-carved ivory. Amos shouted to them:

Hear this word, you cows of Bashan,  
 who are in the mountain of Samaria,  
 who oppress the poor, who crush the needy,  
 who say to their husbands, "Bring, that we may drink!"  
 The Lord God has sworn by his holiness  
 that, behold, the days are coming upon you,  
 when they shall take you away with hooks,  
 even the last of you with fishhooks.  
 And you shall go out through the breaches,  
 every one straight before her;  
 and you shall be cast forth into Harmon,  
 says the Lord (Amos 4:1-3).

Amos refers to their winter houses, summer houses, and ivoried houses:

I will smite the winter house with the summer house;  
 and the great houses shall come to an end,  
 says the Lord (Amos 3:15).

The people's living in luxury had led to decay, and Amos was sure that they would become easy victims of their powerful neighbors, Assyria and Egypt, whose armies would sweep down upon Israel.

Proclaim to the strongholds in Assyria,  
 and to the strongholds in the land of Egypt,  
 and say, "Assemble yourselves upon the mountains of Samaria,  
 and see the great tumults within her,  
 and the oppressions in her midst."  
 "They do not know how to do right," says the Lord,  
 "those who store up violence and robbery in their strongholds."  
 Therefore thus says the Lord God:  
 "An adversary shall surround the land,  
 and bring down your defences from you,  
 and your strongholds shall be plundered" (Amos 3:9-11).

Amos nevertheless offered hope to those who would really seek Yahweh:

Seek the Lord and live,  
 lest he break out like fire in the house of Joseph,  
 and it devour, with none to quench it for Bethel,  
 O you who turn justice to wormwood,  
 and cast down righteousness to the earth! (Amos 5:6, 7).

Seeking Yahweh is much more than traditional worship in the temples, declared Amos:

. . . but do not seek Bethel,  
and do not enter into Gilgal  
or cross over to Beer-sheba;  
for Gilgal shall surely go into exile,  
and Bethel shall come to nought (Amos 5:5).

Seek good, and not evil,  
that you may live;  
and so the Lord, the God of hosts, will be with you,  
as you have said.  
Hate evil, and love good,  
and establish justice in the gate;  
it may be that the Lord, the God of hosts,  
will be gracious to the remnant of Joseph (Amos 5:14, 15).

I hate, I despise your feasts,  
and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies.  
Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and cereal offerings,  
I will not accept them,  
and the peace offerings of your fatted beasts  
I will not look upon.  
Take away from me the noise of your songs;  
to the melody of your harps I will not listen.  
But let justice roll down like waters,  
and righteousness like an overflowing stream (Amos 5:21-24).

Such startling words must have sounded like the cries of a fanatic to the Israelite worshipers at Bethel. One of the reactions was as follows:

Then Amaziah the priest of Bethel sent to Jeroboam king of Israel, saying, "Amos has conspired against you in the midst of the house of Israel; the land is not able to bear all his words . . ." (Amos 7:10).

Even more disturbing were the declarations of Amos that Yahweh would punish these people, including King Jeroboam II, who is mentioned in 2 Kings 14:23-27, by exile:

Therefore thus saith the Lord:  
"Your wife shall be a harlot in the city,  
and your sons and your daughters shall fall by the sword,  
and your land shall be parceled out by line;  
you yourself shall die in an unclean land,  
and Israel shall surely go into exile away from its land" (Amos 7:17).

Amaziah ordered Amos to leave the shrine:

And Amaziah said to Amos, "O seer, go, flee away to the land of Judah, and eat bread there, and prophesy there; but never again prophesy at Bethel, for it is the king's sanctuary, and it is a temple of the kingdom" (Amos 7:12, 13).

Amos replied:

I am no prophet, nor a prophet's son; but I am a herdsman, and a dresser of sycamore trees, and the Lord took me from following the flock, and the Lord said to me, "Go, prophesy to my people Israel" Amos 7:14b, 15).

In this stern message of Amos we find the dawning of a nobler form of religion and a clearer understanding of God.

The book of Amos was probably not written by the prophet himself. Parts of it seem to refer to later times, after the fall of Jerusalem (cf. Amos 9:11-15). There are two great contributions in this book. The first is that God deals with all nations and not alone with Israel (cf. Amos 9:7). The second is God's concern with justice and the principle that he is worshiped more properly by right dealings between people (cf. Amos 5:21-24).

### *Morality More Important than Ceremonials*

Some of the other prophets, like Hosea, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Micah, also emphasized justice and righteousness. People are important to these prophets. Yahweh demands honesty, justice, and mercy toward others, even slaves and the widows.

For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice,  
the knowledge of God, rather than burnt offerings (Hosea 6:6).

For if you truly amend your ways and your doings, if you truly execute justice one with another, if you do not oppress the alien, the fatherless or the widow, or shed innocent blood in this place, and if you do not go after other gods to your own hurt, then I will let you dwell in this place, in the land that I gave of old to your fathers for ever (Jeremiah 7:5-7).

Woe to those who call evil good  
and good evil,  
who put darkness for light  
and light for darkness,  
who put bitter for sweet  
and sweet for bitter! (Isaiah 5:20).

Woe to those who decree iniquitous decrees,  
 and the writers who keep writing oppression,  
 to turn aside the needy from justice  
 and to rob the poor of my people of their right,  
 that widows may be their spoil,  
 and that they may make the fatherless their prey! (Isaiah 10:1, 2).

When you come to appear before me,  
 who requires of you  
 this trampling of my courts?  
 Bring no more vain offerings;  
 incense is an abomination to me.  
 New moon and sabbath and the calling of assemblies —  
 I cannot endure iniquity and solemn assembly.  
 Your new moons and your appointed feasts  
 my soul hates;  
 they have become a burden to me,  
 I am weary of bearing them.  
 When you spread forth your hands,  
 I will hide my eyes from you;  
 even though you make many prayers,  
 I will not listen;  
 your hands are full of blood.  
 Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean;  
 remove the evil of your doings  
 from before my eyes;  
 cease to do evil,  
 learn to do good;  
 seek justice,  
 correct oppression;  
 defend the fatherless,  
 plead for the widow (Isaiah 1:12-17).

“With what shall I come before the Lord,  
 and bow myself before God on high?  
 Shall I come before him with burnt offerings,  
 with calves a year old?  
 Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams,  
 with ten thousands of rivers of oil?  
 Shall I give my first-born for my transgression,  
 the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?”  
 He has showed you, O man, what is good;  
 and what does the Lord require of you  
 but to do justice, and to love kindness,  
 and to walk humbly with your God? (Micah 6:6-8).

*The Prophets Urge People to Give Up the High Places*

Slowly the Hebrews were learning to worship Yahweh alone instead of the Baal at the high places. Some of the prophets, such as Micah, saw how often the people were confused in their attempts to worship Yahweh at these old high places. Often they returned to the worship of the old gods of Canaan (cf. 2 Kings 18:4,22). People who have worshiped in one way for hundreds of years do not change easily or quickly. So it was with the Hebrews. The Hebrew prophets spoke again and again to the people about loyalty to Yahweh. In order to overcome these old habits of worship, some prophets ordered the destruction of high places.

*A New Law Book (Deuteronomy 5:26; 28:1-46)*

Before 621 B.C., parts of Deuteronomy had been written (cf. 2 Kings 22:3 to 23:25). In Deuteronomy we see certain results of the messages of the prophets. It includes not only a re-wording of Exodus 20—23, but also some very great changes in worship. It urges the destruction of all the old shrines, high places of worship, and forms of worship.

When you come into the land which the Lord your God gives you, you shall not learn to follow the abominable practices of those nations. There shall not be found among you any one who burns his son or his daughter as an offering, any one who practices divination, a soothsayer, or an augur, or a sorcerer, or a charmer, or a medium, or a wizard, or a necromancer. For whoever does these things is an abomination to the Lord; and because of these abominable practices the Lord your God is driving them out before you (Deuteronomy 18:9-12).

You shall not make for yourself a graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth (Deuteronomy 5:8).

Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord (Deuteronomy 6:4).

And now, Israel, what does the Lord your God require of you, but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul (Deuteronomy 10:12).

Take heed that you do not offer your burnt offerings at every place that you see; but at the place which the Lord shall choose in one of

your tribes, there you shall offer your burnt offerings, and there you shall do all that I am commanding you. But the holy things which are due from you, and your votive offerings, you shall take, and you shall go to the place which the Lord will choose, and offer your burnt offerings, the flesh and the blood, on the altar of the Lord your God; the blood of your sacrifices shall be poured out on the altar of the Lord your God, but the flesh you may eat (Deuteronomy 12:13, 14, 26, 27).

This Deuteronomic Law, incidentally, brought the Hebrews to Jerusalem for their sacrificial and ceremonial worship of Yahweh (about 621 B.C.). Great ceremonies and special days of festival were to be celebrated in Jerusalem. The religion and worship of Yahweh began to center more and more in this city, until it became the most holy and sacred city of all Palestine to the Hebrews.

We can easily discover the influence of the prophets by comparing earlier codes with the D Code.

*Old Code*

When you buy a Hebrew slave, he shall serve six years, and in the seventh he shall go out free, for nothing (Exodus 21:2).

*D Code*

If your brother, a Hebrew man, or a Hebrew woman, is sold to you, he shall serve you six years, and in the seventh year you shall let him go free from you. And when you let him go free from you, you shall not let him go empty-handed; you shall furnish him liberally out of your flock, out of your threshing floor, and out of your wine press; as the Lord your God has blessed you, you shall give to him. You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God redeemed you; therefore I command you this today (Deuteronomy 15:12-15).

*Belief in Disasters as Punishment by Yahweh*

The prophets frequently advised the leaders of Ephraim and Judah about their relations with other nations. When the people failed in justice and in devotion to Yahweh, the prophets threatened them with punishment. The Deuteronomic Code stressed the idea that failure to worship Yahweh brought disaster. An old record which we know as 1 and 2 Kings, written about 600

B.C., covering nearly four hundred years' history of the kings of the two Hebrew nations, also emphasized that punishment had followed the failure of these rulers in their devotion to Yahweh.

And the people of Israel did secretly against the Lord their God things that were not right. They built for themselves high places at all their towns, from watch tower to fortified city; they set up for themselves pillars and Asherim on every high hill and under every green tree; and there they burned incense on all the high places, as the nations did whom the Lord carried away before them. And they did wicked things, provoking the Lord to anger, and they served idols, of which the Lord had said to them, "You shall not do this." Yet the Lord warned Israel and Judah by every prophet and every seer, saying, "Turn from your evil ways and keep my commandments and my statutes, in accordance with all the law which I commanded your fathers, and which I sent to you by my servants the prophets." And they forsook all the commandments of the Lord their God, and made for themselves molten images of two calves; and they made an Asherah, and worshiped all the host of heaven, and served Baal. And they burned their sons and their daughters as offerings, and used divination and sorcery, and sold themselves to do evil in the sight of the Lord, provoking him to anger. Therefore the Lord was very angry with Israel, and removed them out of his sight; none was left but the tribe of Judah only (2 Kings 17:9-13, 16, 17, 18).

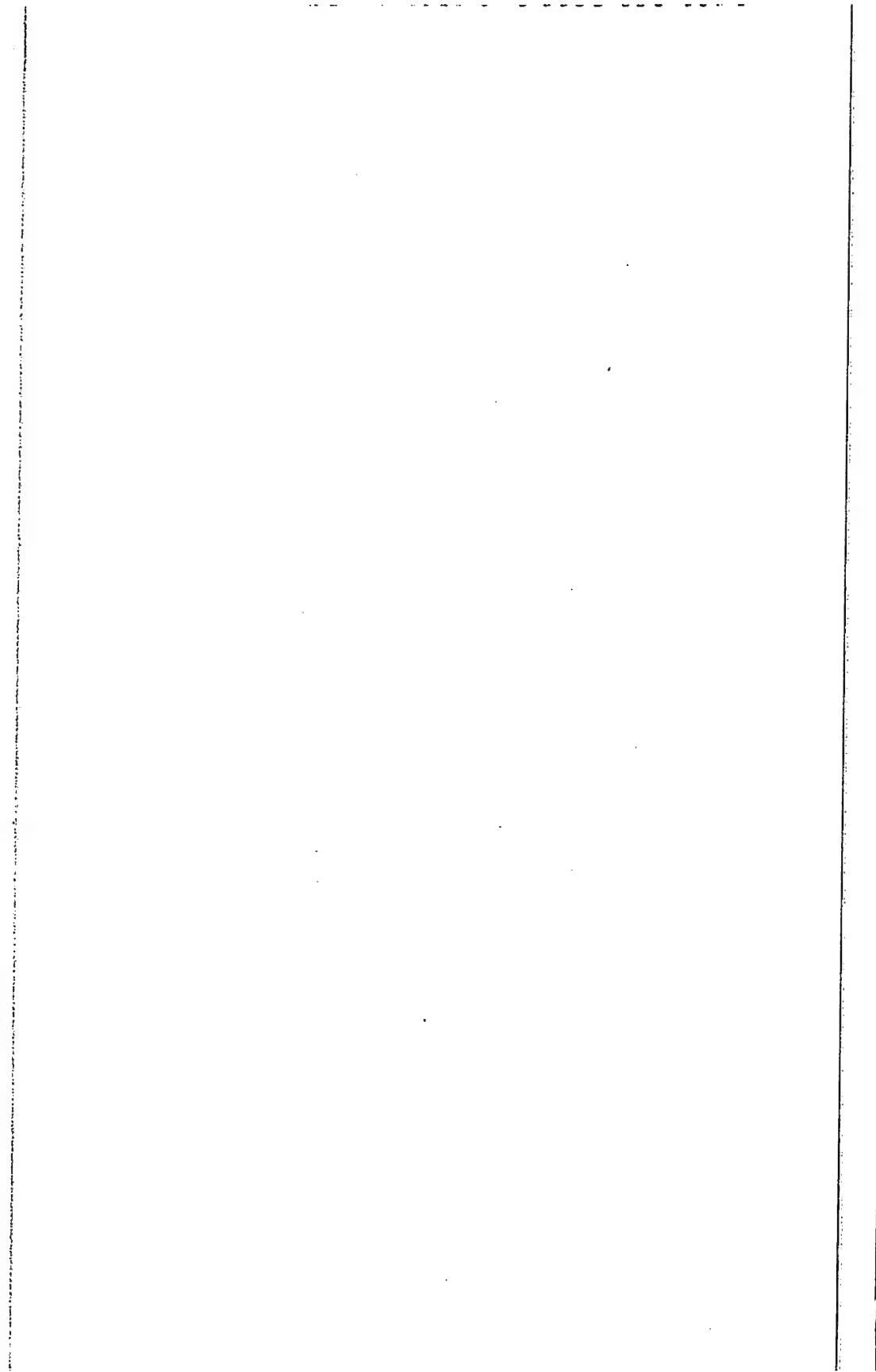
### *Jeremiah Struggles for Yahweh Worship*

Hundreds of years after the Hebrews entered Canaan, the prophet Jeremiah urged devotion to Yahweh in words such as these:

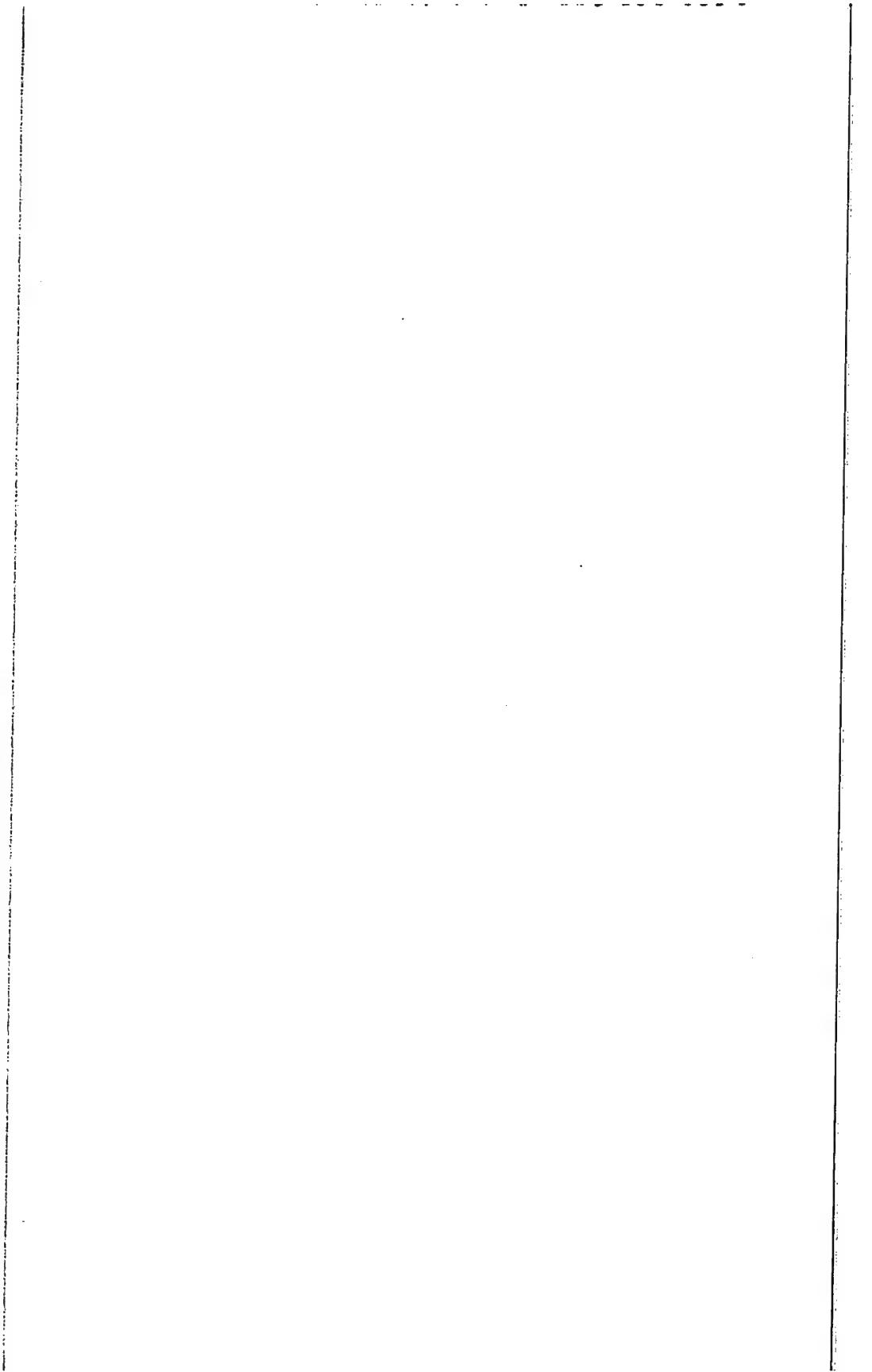
But where are your gods  
that you made for yourself?  
Let them arise, if they can save you,  
in your time of trouble;  
for as many as your cities  
are your gods, O Judah (Jeremiah 2:28).

For your gods have become as many as your cities, O Judah; and as many as the streets of Jerusalem are the altars you have set up to shame, altars to burn incense to Baal (Jeremiah 11:13).

But Jeremiah's words went unheeded, and soon there was national tragedy.



*V*  
*Exile*  
*and*  
*Return*



# 16

## *The Exiled Jews Learned More of God*

DIVIDING THIS LITTLE COUNTRY OF CANAAN into two kingdoms had made each of them too weak to resist the more powerful countries around them. Samaria was the first to fall. Farther south, Judah began to experience much turmoil and frequent change of rulers, and eventually she became the pawn of two great powers, Babylonia and Egypt. When she tried to rebel in 598 B.C., her efforts only brought King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon to the walls of Jerusalem; he carried away to Babylon the king, many nobles, and skilled workmen (cf. 2 Kings 24:10-17). Nine years later, in spite of the pleadings of Jeremiah, who advised submission to Babylonia, the Judeans again revolted.

One day the people of Jerusalem were horrified to find that Nebuchadnezzar and his armies were again outside their walls (cf. 2 Kings 25:1-23; Jeremiah 39:1-10). A long, severe siege began. Finally the day came when the people were unable to defend themselves any longer against famine and death within their walled city and the might of the king of Babylon attacking from without (cf. Jeremiah 38:14-23). So Nebuchadnezzar

... carried off all the treasures of the house of the Lord, and the treasures of the king's house, and cut in pieces all the vessels of gold in the temple of the Lord, which Solomon king of Israel had made (2 Kings 24:13).

By this time, the Jews considered Jerusalem as their own holy city and the Temple as the center for the worship of Yahweh.

So it was a most terrible day for them when Solomon's beautiful Temple of Yahweh was destroyed. Nebuchadnezzar (as we have read) captured and burned Jerusalem, the palaces, and the Temple; broke down the walls; and plundered the gold and silver treasures in the Temple (586 B.C.). He carried away the king and the princes, the craftsmen who would be good workers, and the wealthy people of Jerusalem. These people were tied together into a captive train and marched off to the land of Babylonia, probably to settle in and around the famous city of Babylon. Only the poorest people were allowed to remain in Judah.

It seemed to these Judeans that Yahweh must have forsaken them. The prophet Jeremiah wrote of Yahweh:

I have forsaken my house,  
 I have abandoned my heritage;  
 I have given the beloved of my soul  
 into the hands of her enemies (Jeremiah 12:7).

The book of Lamentations also reveals some of the feelings of the people when they saw the end of their country (read Lamentations 1 and 2). In this strange land of Babylonia many Jews recalled with gratitude their God, Yahweh, and were very sad when they remembered that they could no longer go to worship in their Temple. Their feelings of homesickness and their love for Jerusalem (poetically called "Zion") are movingly expressed in Psalm 137.

By the waters of Babylon,  
 there we sat down and wept,  
 when we remembered Zion.  
 On the willows there  
 we hung up our lyres.  
 For there our captors  
 required of us songs,  
 and our tormentors, mirth, saying,  
 "Sing us one of the songs of Zion!"  
 How shall we sing the Lord's song  
 in a foreign land? (Psalm 137:1-4).

### *Life in Exile*

Life for the Jews in this foreign land, however, turned out to be very good. Instead of receiving the usual treatment given captives of war, the Judeans (later called Jews) were neither

sold into slavery nor separated from their families. They were given fertile, well-watered land to cultivate. Recently, three hundred clay tablets in cuneiform characters have been unearthed, containing lists of foods such as oil and barley paid to captives. Even the exiled King Joiachin and his sons were well cared for. Surprisingly, many exiles found life in Babylonia to be more pleasant than that in their homeland of Canaan. Babylon was a beautiful city with many advantages. We can well imagine the city with its lovely Ishtar Gate, because modern excavations indicate what it must have looked like in ancient times. Though they missed their Temple in Jerusalem, many Jews never did return to Canaan when later they were given permission to do so.

At the beginning, when the exiles complained of their lot, Jeremiah told them:

Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat their produce. Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease. But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare (Jeremiah 29:5-7).

It took German archaeologists eighteen years to dig up ancient Babylon. It covered an area of five hundred acres and is said to have had 179 temples. It was a walled city divided by the Euphrates River. Most of its houses were of mud or of reed and were scattered amidst gardens and palm groves.

Eight gates provided entrances through the inner walls of the city. The Ishtar Gate, the best preserved today, was reached through the magnificent Procession Street, an avenue 63 feet wide. It passed in front of the Royal Palace, which had been built by Nebuchadnezzar over a smaller one. Nearby was a huge ziggurat which had suffered much damage from wars and was rebuilt. The supreme deity of Babylon was Marduk.

### *Ezekiel*

Ezekiel was a priest of Jerusalem. He was among the first Judeans to be carried away to Babylonia. As an exile he lived in Tel-abib, a town near Babylon, where he seems to have kept in touch with events in Judah. At first he described in his

book the sins of Israel and called down threats of doom: "The soul that sins shall die" (Ezekiel 18:4). He urged the people to obey Yahweh. Suddenly his message changed when he learned of the complete destruction of Jerusalem and the second exile of its leaders (cf. Ezekiel 33-48). Then he began to predict the restoration of the Jews to their own country (cf. Ezekiel 37:1-14) and the triumph of God's purpose. He described to the people his vision of a great new Temple and the ceremonies for a holy community (see Ezekiel 40-48). He stressed the holiness of God, especially in the Temple worship. It is believed that Ezekiel was one of the prophets who at this time inspired the Jews to become a special people.

*An Unknown Prophet Speaks to the Refugees in Babylon*

One of the greatest prophets who spoke to the Jews in exile (c. 546 B.C.) is not known to us by name. Scholars call him Second Isaiah, for his writings are combined with those of the earlier prophet named Isaiah. Second Isaiah spoke words of comfort and of high religion to these exiles.

Comfort, comfort my people,  
says your God.  
Speak tenderly to Jerusalem,  
and cry to her  
that her warfare is ended,  
that her iniquity is pardoned,  
that she has received from the Lord's hand  
double for all her sins (Isaiah 40:1, 2).

Why do you say, O Jacob,  
and speak, O Israel,  
"My way is hid from the Lord,  
and my right is disregarded by my God"?  
Have you not known? Have you not heard?  
The Lord is the everlasting God,  
the Creator of the ends of the earth.  
He does not faint or grow weary,  
his understanding is unsearchable.  
He gives power to the faint,  
and to him who has no might he increases strength.  
Even youths shall faint and be weary,  
and young men shall fall exhausted;  
but they who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength,  
they shall mount up with wings like eagles,

they shall run and not be weary,  
they shall walk and not faint (Isaiah 40:27-31).

Living as foreigners in the strange land of Babylonia taught the Hebrews many wonderful things, especially about God. So these Jews came to realize that there is one God of all people in every part of the earth. God can be worshiped anywhere, even in a foreign land. The words of one of their poets help us to appreciate how much they were learning of God:

Whither shall I go from thy Spirit?  
Or whither shall I flee from thy presence?  
If I ascend to heaven, thou art there!  
If I make my bed in Sheol, thou art there!  
If I take the wings of the morning  
and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea,  
even there thy hand shall lead me,  
and thy right hand shall hold me.  
If I say, "Let only darkness cover me,  
and the light about me be night,"  
even the darkness is not dark to thee,  
the night is bright as the day;  
for darkness is as light with thee (Psalm 139:7-12).

Scholars generally believe that Second Isaiah addressed the exiles about 550 B.C. and offered hope for their return to Jerusalem, an event that took place in 538 B.C. Chapters 40 – 55 of the Book of Isaiah are considered to be his message. This remarkable man taught the Jews the noblest understanding of God. He declared that there is but one God and that he is the only true God of the whole world. He said that Yahweh had directed the world from the very beginning and will continue to do so to the very end.

The Lord is the everlasting God,  
the Creator of the ends of the earth (Isaiah 40:28b).

For I am God, and there is no other;  
I am God, and there is none like me (Isaiah 46:9b).

Thus says the Lord,  
your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel:  
"I am the Lord your God,  
who teaches you to profit,  
who leads you in the way you should go . . ." (Isaiah 48:17).

Second Isaiah said that the Jews had been chosen to be the servants of Yahweh. They were to be missionaries to all the world, in order to help people to understand Yahweh and to worship him. He encouraged the exiles living in this strange land to understand that their sufferings would be of use to them in bringing others to know Yahweh. He said that Yahweh was permitting innocent people to suffer in order to help them to lead the pagans to know the true Lord. He urged the Jews to be patient in their sufferings so as to show the world the way to the worship of the only true God, who had called them to be his servant.

... "You are my servant,  
Israel, in whom I will be glorified" (Isaiah 49:3).

Behold my servant, whom I uphold,  
my chosen, in whom my soul delights;  
I have put my spirit upon him,  
he will bring forth justice to the nations.

.....  
he will faithfully bring forth justice.  
He will not fail or be discouraged  
till he has established justice in the earth;  
and the coastlands wait for his law (Isaiah 42:1-4).

Someday, said this prophet, the people of the world will discover that this suffering of the Jews was also for their sakes in order to lead them to God. Such people in amazement will say of the Jews:

Who has believed what we have heard?

.....  
He [the Jewish people] had no form or comeliness that we should look  
at him,  
and no beauty that we should desire him.  
He was despised and rejected by men;

.....  
Surely he has borne our griefs

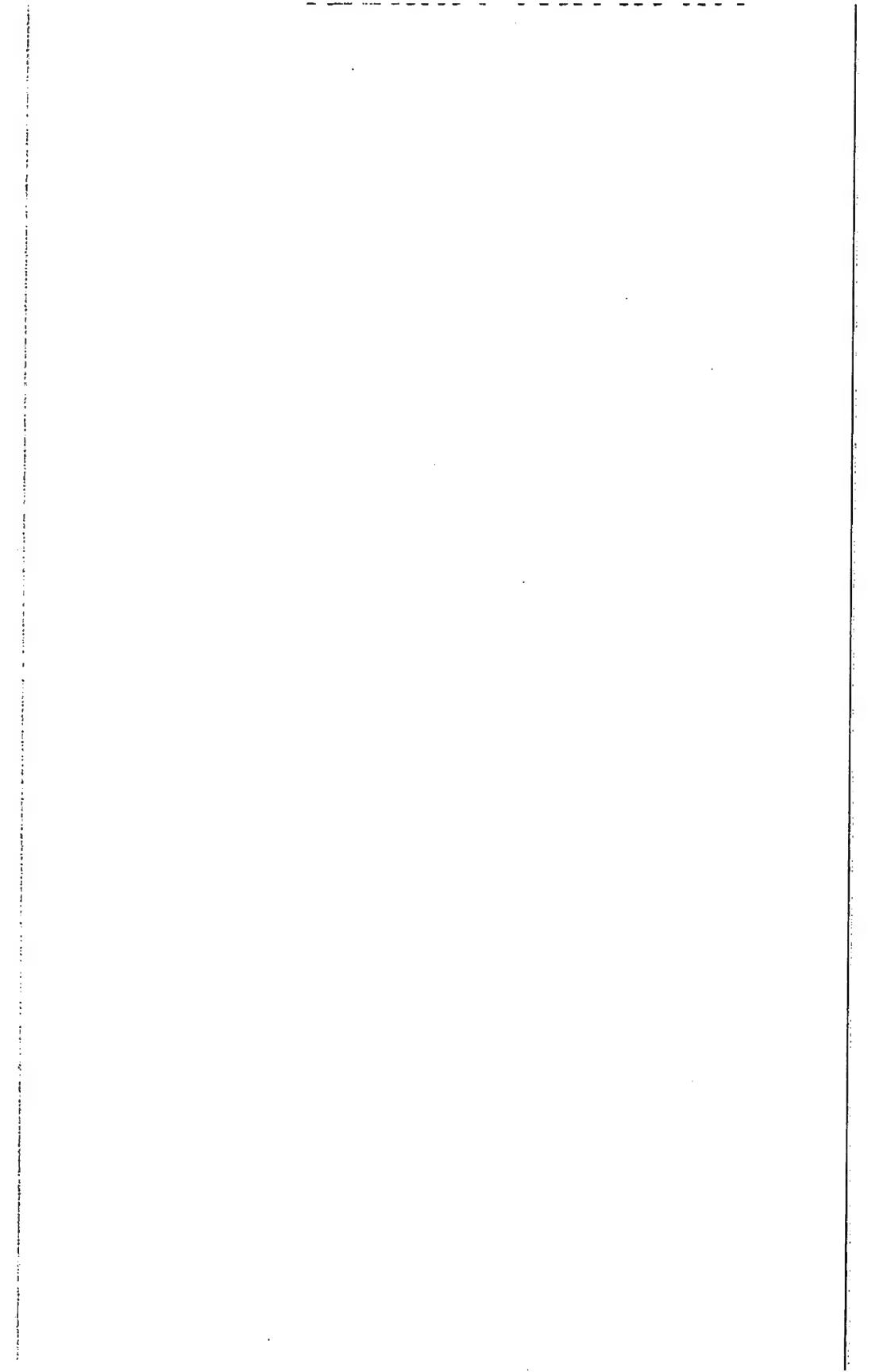
.....  
But he was wounded for our transgressions,  
he was bruised for our iniquities;

.....  
All we like sheep have gone astray;  
we have turned every one to his own way;  
and the Lord has laid on him  
the iniquity of us all (Isaiah 53:1-6).

In later times, these words about a suffering servant were applied to Jesus. He read them when he spoke in his home synagogue (Luke 4:18, 19).

When innocent people suffer, they sometimes are able to convey the very noblest things about God and his world. Love, forgiveness, courage, and sacrifice are some of the ways in which God is to be seen in the lives of people.

After their exile, the Jews stressed the message of Ezekiel and ignored the great emphasis of Second Isaiah. Ezra inspired the great plan of Judaism. Under his influence and that of Ezekiel there grew the idea of a holy community with the Temple as its center and the Law as its authority and guide for all of life. The strength of the Jews against pagan forces developed around their religious devotion and obedience to the Law. God's will, they believed, was revealed in the Law, and prosperity, health, and peace were the rewards of obedience to it. Suffering, adversity, and even death followed disobedience (cf. Psalm 1; 19:7-14; 119).



*I7*  
*Return*  
*to*  
*Jerusalem*

IT WAS ALMOST FIFTY YEARS before any of the Jews in exile were permitted to return to their homeland, and then a remarkable thing happened. Persia had grown to be a great power under its ruler, Cyrus. After he conquered Babylonia, Cyrus declared that the Jews of Babylon could return to Jerusalem (538 B.C.). The following seems to be the king's original decree:

Thus says Cyrus king of Persia: The Lord, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and he has charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Whoever is among you of all his people, may his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and rebuild the house of the Lord, the God of Israel — he is the God who is in Jerusalem; and let each survivor, in whatever place he sojourns, be assisted by the men of his place with silver and gold, with goods and with beasts, besides free-will offerings for the house of God which is in Jerusalem (Ezra 1:2-4).

This brought great rejoicing to some of the Jews, who accepted the opportunity to go back to Jerusalem. Others, however, preferred to remain in Babylonia, where life had become comfortable and prosperous.

*Judaism Begins*

In Jerusalem, the Jews found that the walls were down and the Temple was in ruins. The people that had remained were living wretchedly. Some of the accounts of this period are con-

fused and conflicting, but Ezra 7:27 – 9:15 and Nehemiah 1:1 – 7:53 are particularly helpful.

Ezra was shocked to find that some of the people of Judah had married foreigners, so he took drastic measures to cleanse Jewish blood from such foreign pollution.

In those days also I saw the Jews who had married women of Ashdod, Ammon, and Moab; and half of their children spoke the language of Ashdod, and they could not speak the language of Judah, but the language of each people. And I contended with them and cursed them and beat some of them and pulled out their hair; and I made them take oath in the name of God, saying, "You shall not give your daughters to their sons, or take their daughters for your sons or for yourselves . . ." (Nehemiah 13:23-25).

Some of the new Jewish laws had to do with marriage. Ezra, Nehemiah, and other leaders said that the Jews should not marry people of other nationalities (cf. Ezra 10:3; Nehemiah 10:28-30; 13:23-29). Under Nehemiah a conflict with the Samaritans to the north followed, and consequently a break with them resulted (Nehemiah 13:1-3).

Ezra established the elaborate system of Judaism. Under his leadership and the influence of Ezekiel there developed the idea of the Jews as a holy community with the Temple as its center and the Law or Torah (the Pentateuch) as its authority. According to Nehemiah 8, the book of the Law was read by Ezra to the Jews, and they entered into a solemn covenant to separate themselves from other peoples by rigorous obedience to the Law and the Temple services. The emphases of Second Isaiah tended to be ignored. The Law code which was read by Ezra was presumably the Priestly code written after the Exile.

### *Rebuilding*

The returning Jews gradually rebuilt their houses. The more daring built the altar of God and set up sacrifices. The Temple seems to have been neglected until the coming of Zerubbabel, who had been appointed into the office of governor by the Persian ruler Darius, who was on the throne 521-485 B.C. (Ezra 3:2; 4:24).

In the second year of Darius the king, in the sixth month, on the first day of the month, the word of the Lord came by Haggai the prophet to Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, "Thus says the

Lord of hosts: This people say the time has not yet come to rebuild the house of the Lord." Then the word of the Lord came by Haggai the prophet, "Is it a time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses, while this house lies in ruins?" (Haggai 1:1-4).

By 520 B.C. Haggai and Zechariah had persuaded the Jews to rebuild the Temple, which had been destroyed in 586 B.C. (cf. Haggai 1:4-11, 14). Zechariah seemed less enthusiastic, however, about rebuilding. For him external forms and observances did not indicate true religion (cf. Zechariah 7:4-11). To him there were the more important matters of goodness, justice, and mercy.

And the word of the Lord came to Zechariah, saying, "Thus says the Lord of hosts. Render true judgments, show kindness and mercy each to his brother, do not oppress the widow, the fatherless, the sojourner, or the poor; and let none of you devise evil against his brother in your heart." But they refused to hearken, and turned a stubborn shoulder, and stopped their ears that they might not hear (Zechariah 7:8-11).

Here we find the influence of the nobler teachings of the earlier prophets.

Probably it was during the period from 444 to 432 B.C. that Nehemiah was made governor of Judea. Nehemiah had been an official at the Persian court of Artaxerxes Longimanus (465-424 B.C.). When he came to Jerusalem he was shocked by the conditions which he found there. Not only were the walls in a state of ruin but the rich were once again exploiting the poor, money lenders were charging exorbitant interest, and peasants were losing their land and even selling themselves as slaves. Nehemiah, as governor, set to work seriously on these social conditions. When he had successfully rebuilt the walls and the gates of the city of Jerusalem, he enforced Sabbath observance (cf. Nehemiah 10:28-30; 13:23-30). This record of his observations and work is most interesting and revealing (Nehemiah 1:1 - 7:73a; 11 - 12).

### *The High Priest*

Under Persian rule, the Jews came to have a high priest who led their religious community. He was the head of all the priests. He carried on negotiations with the governments for the Jews. By the second century, the high priest served as head

of the Sanhedrin, a court which dealt with cases involving the Torah. Under Roman rule, the high priest appears to have exercised considerable authority. In the time of Jesus, the high priests were wealthy and seem to have been separated in sympathy from the common people. The Temple of Jerusalem, however, served as a unifying center for Jews everywhere. To it they could come from many places for great festivals such as we see in the time of Jesus.

### *The Holiness of God*

When the Jews returned from the Babylonian exile, many of them, especially their leaders, were dedicated to Yahweh alone as the supreme and only God of the universe. They conceived of Yahweh as too holy and mighty to be called by a name. This is the reason why the word "Lord" or other substitutes were used for the name "Yahweh." God's holiness made him appear to be separate and distant, and his preeminence filled the worshiper with awe.

### *The Bible Takes Form*

Most of the Old Testament as we have it today was arranged, edited, and written by the Jews after their return from exile (538 B.C.). Therefore it bears much of the imprint of Judaism as it developed in Judea in these later days.

The messages of the prophets and the older laws were doubtless read and studied by the Jews while they were in Babylon, and this may have led to the synagogue as a place of assembly and particularly as a place for the study of sacred writings.

*Chart 3. Order of Events in the Hebrew Story*

586 B.C. The people of Judah were conquered by the Babylonians under Nebuchadnezzar and their leaders carried into exile in Babylon, 586 B.C. The Babylonians destroyed the Temple in Jerusalem.

550 B.C. Second Isaiah wrote to comfort the Jewish exiles and gave emphatic teaching about God as the one God of the universe. The D Code was combined with Kings and Judges.

538 B.C. The Persians conquered the Babylonians, and King Cyrus allowed the Jewish exiles to return to Jerusalem in 538 B.C. The Jews probably brought the synagogue to Judah. The Jews were under Persian rule from 538 to 333 B.C.

520-516 B.C. The Jews rebuilt the Temple in Jerusalem (520-516 B.C.). They learned the Aramaic language from the Persians.

500-450 B.C. The priestly writer combined the J, E, D, and Leviticus writings together with his own interpretations. The Book of Ruth was written about 500 B.C.

444 B.C. Nehemiah led in rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem.

400 B.C. The Pentateuch (Torah) was declared sacred law.

350-320 B.C. About 350 B.C. the Book of Jonah was written. Greek rule over the Jews began with Alexander the Great (332 to 320 B.C.).

301-198 B.C. The Ptolemies, successors to the Greeks, ruled over the Jews 301-198 B.C.

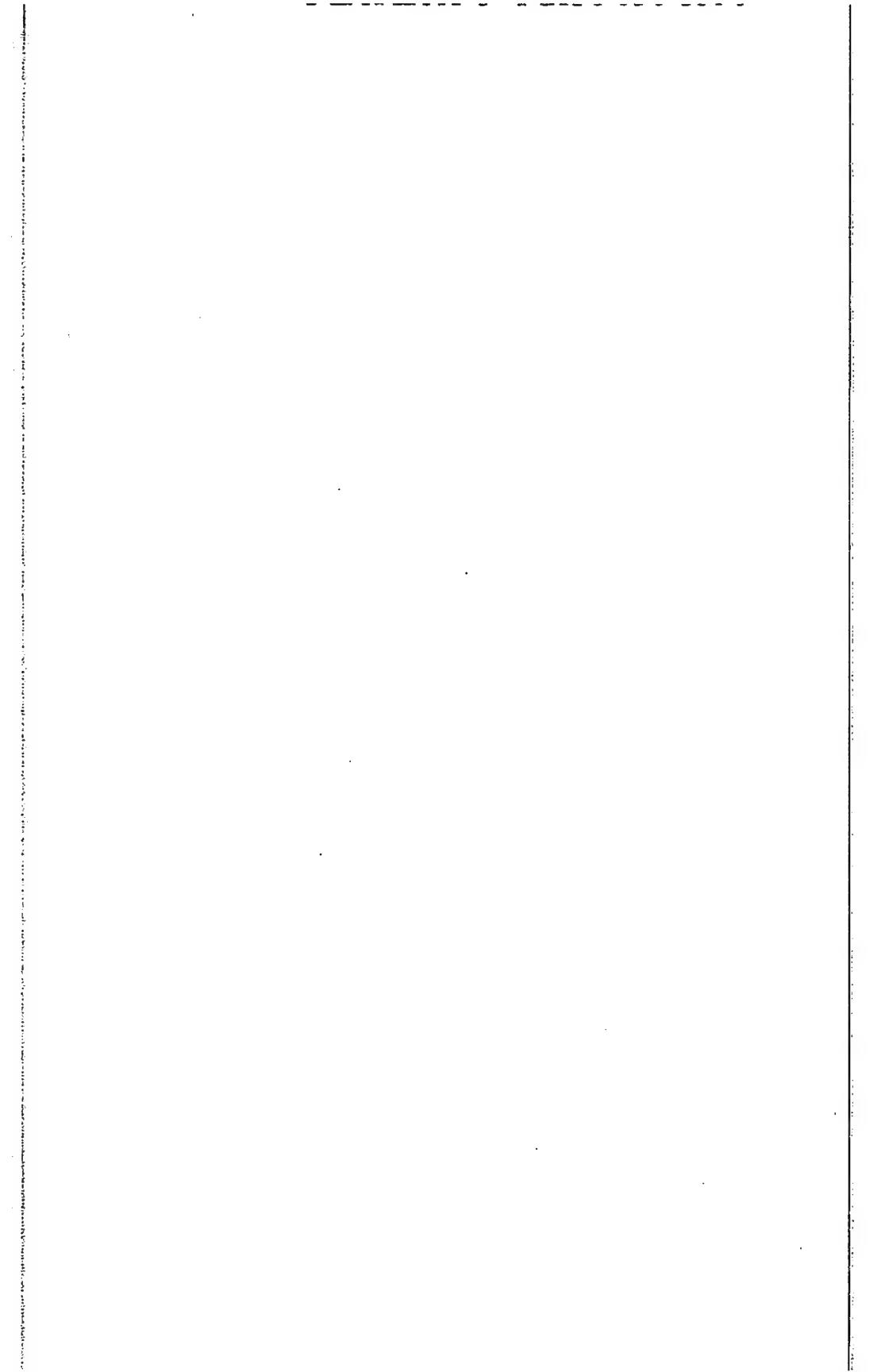
By 200 B.C. Many of the sacred writings of the Old Testament were agreed on.

175-164 B.C. King Antiochus IV (Epiphanes), a Syrian ruler, imposed Greek culture on the Jews. Then Judas Maccabaeus and his sons led in a Jewish revolt beginning in 168 B.C. Jewish devotion to the Torah increased.

63 B.C. Roman rule began in Palestine under the conquest of Pompey.

37-4 B.C. Herod the Great was king of Judea under Rome.

8-4 B.C. Jesus was born. His ministry continued until about A.D. 29.



*Religion  
After the Exile*

CERTAIN PRIESTS BROUGHT TOGETHER the writings of J, E, D, and other authors dealing with the early days of the Hebrews as well as with their many codes of laws which had grown up over the centuries. As these priests combined the old writings into five scrolls, they made comments on them and gave the books their own viewpoint. They started with the creation story and closed with the Hebrew settlement in Canaan. Combining so many writings creates great problems for readers today because so many viewpoints, even contradictions and conflicts, exist in these first five books of the Old Testament, called the Pentateuch. Six or seven codes of laws, of different periods of time, are included. The priests used past incidents to emphasize the importance of laws which they stressed and wished to be obeyed.

*The Priestly Charter*

This Priestly Code of laws became the charter of the new Jewish church. It was created after the Temple was rebuilt and reflects the conditions of the Persian period (538-331 B.C.). The Priestly work on the first five books of the Old Testament was likely carried on between 521 and 485 B.C., and it was adopted about 400 B.C. The Priestly Code became the Law of a holy nation of Jews, whose ruler is the God of the universe. Instead of stressing right living as did the great prophets, the priests stressed ritual and right form in obedience to God. They

taught that everything belonged to God, and thus they became involved in the study and observance of festivals, sacrifices, forms, and laws.

The Law explained how to worship in the Temple, what the priests were to do, how to keep the Sabbath, and how to carry out different ceremonial days and endless details of life. Because many of these laws were so intricate that worship and religion became formal and difficult, priests and devout worshipers had to consult them and obey every detail. The Temple became a place for elaborate religious ceremony for both priests and people on festival days. The Torah (Law) and Temple now were central. Whatever one thinks of the legalism of this Priestly Code, it did hold the Jews to a devotion to God that has lasted until today. The great emphasis on the Law became a bulwark for the Jews against the forces of paganism which surrounded them. It created requirements for worship and endless other practices in order to keep the Jews loyal to God. The Priestly Code tried to remove every trace of pagan religion. God's will was to be found in the Law which told men precisely what to do. This Law brought together a community of worshipers of the one God of the universe, including not only the Jews but people of other backgrounds who had been converted to the Jewish faith.

For the assembly, there shall be one statute for you and for the stranger who sojourns with you, a perpetual statute throughout your generations; as you are, so shall the sojourner be before the Lord (Numbers 15:15).

The priests gave their attention to worship at the Temple in Jerusalem. The Priestly writing provided particular directions for such worship. The very center in the Temple was the Holy of Holies, into which only the high priest could enter. This symbolized the dwelling place of God; several steps led up to this sacred part of the Temple.

Daily sacrifices, morning and evening, together with other special sacrifices and elaborate rituals on festival occasions, occupied the time of the priests. In addition, private offerings were made by individuals who followed the requirements of the law. Jews and priests thronged the Temple courts. This worship was a focal point for the Jews, setting them apart from other nations and recalling their common heritage.

### *Meaning of Offerings*

It was always customary for Hebrews to offer many kinds of sacrifices in their worship of Yahweh. Yet, before the exile, a Jewish writer insisted that Yahweh did not wish offerings and sacrifices, but justice and goodness (cf. Amos 5:21-25). He also said, "Seek good and not evil" (Amos 5:14).

Hosea, another great prophet, declared in the name of Yahweh:

For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice,  
the knowledge of God, rather than burnt offerings (Hosea 6:6).

And Micah said:

With what shall I come before the Lord,  
and bow myself before God on high?  
Shall I come before him with burnt offerings,  
with calves a year old?  
Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams,  
with ten thousands of rivers of oil?  
Shall I give my first-born for my transgression,  
the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?  
He has showed you, O man, what is good;  
and what does the Lord require of you  
but to do justice, and to love kindness,  
and to walk humbly with your God? (Micah 6:6-8).

So we find that Jewish ideas of worship in the Old Testament underwent many changes. Instead of making a gift of an animal or grain to the gods, some of the great Jews believed that it was more important to bring gifts of goodness and of love. "To do righteousness and justice is more acceptable to the Lord than sacrifice" (Proverbs 21:3). One Jewish psalm writer says that animal and grain sacrifices are of little value to Yahweh.

Sacrifice and offering thou dost not desire;  
but thou hast given me an open ear.  
Burnt offering and sin offering  
thou hast not required (Psalm 40:6).

Another psalm by an unknown Hebrew writer says of Yahweh:

. . . I am God, your God.  
I do not reprove you for your sacrifices;  
your burnt offerings are continually before me.

I will accept no bull from your house,  
 nor he-goat from your folds.  
 For every beast of the forest is mine,  
 the cattle on a thousand hills.  
 I know all the birds of the air,  
 and all that moves in the field is mine.

If I were hungry, I would not tell you;  
 for the world and all that is in it is mine.  
 Do I eat the flesh of bulls,  
 or drink the blood of goats?  
 Offer to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving,  
 and pay your vows to the Most High;  
 and call upon me in the day of trouble;  
 I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me (Psalm 50:7-15).

Still another psalm reads:

I will praise the name of God with a song;  
 I will magnify him with thanksgiving.  
 This will please the Lord more than an ox  
 or a bull with horns and hoofs (Psalm 69:30-31).

Here we see how far the Hebrews had traveled from the time when they had offered animals and perhaps their own children as gifts to the gods and to Yahweh. From a mountain god, a god of war, they had come to the worship of the one God of all mankind, who asks for the gifts of justice, mercy, and love. Yet in the time of Jesus there still were elaborate sacrifices made in the great Temple of Herod in Jerusalem. Ceremony is easier to follow than goodness.

In Jesus' life and teaching we can see clearly what the character of God is and what this means in his worship. Jesus emphasized the inner motive in giving offerings. We read:

Beware of practicing your piety before men in order to be seen by them; for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven.

Thus, when you give alms, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by men. Truly, I say to you, they have their reward. But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your alms may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you (Matthew 6:1-4).

As people grew in their understanding of God, some of them changed their ideas about sacrifices and offerings. Even today

in our churches, Christians seem to have varied motives and reasons for bringing their offerings. Some bring sacrifices and gifts to express thanksgiving; some offer gifts in order to receive praise and honor from people; some bring gifts to try to win and keep the favor of God; others make offerings for the carrying on of work which they believe will fulfill God's purposes in the world.

Belief that goodness itself is an offering to God has been taught by many religious leaders, as may be witnessed in Psalm 103. Jesus taught that kindness and love were the best gifts to bring to God:

God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth (John 4:24).

So if you are offering your gift at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift (Matthew 5:23-24).

And in his teaching he said, "Beware of the scribes, who like to go about in long robes, and to have salutations in the market places and the best seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at feasts, who devour widows' houses and for a pretense make long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation."

And he sat down opposite the treasury, and watched the multitude putting money into the treasury. Many rich people put in large sums. And a poor widow came, and put in two copper coins, which make a penny. And he called his disciples to him, and said to them, "Truly, I say to you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the treasury. For they all contributed out of their abundance; but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, her whole living" (Mark 12:38-44).

### *Festivals*

One of the oldest festivals is the Passover. This feast seems to have undergone many changes. We have seen that in early times it probably was a celebration of the birth of the lambs in the spring and the consecration of the flock for the coming year. It seemed to establish a bond between the deity and the people. Under the Priestly Code the Passover became an elaborate festival.

Another festival grew out of the Jews' concern over the terrible reality of sin. In order to restore the people to a state of

holiness before a most holy God, they held an annual ceremonial called the Day of Atonement (cf. Leviticus 16; 23:26-32; Numbers 29:7-11). On this solemn day, the sins of the people were "covered" by ritual and ceremonial cleansing.

### *Scribes, Pharisees, and Sadducees*

The problems of obedience to the Law grew more and more complicated until special Jewish scholars were called upon to define and interpret the Law. These were laymen called scribes, who in a way took the place of the prophets of former times. By the close of the third century B.C., they had made official interpretations of the Law. Prior to the work of the scribes, priests had been regarded as the only learned members of the community.

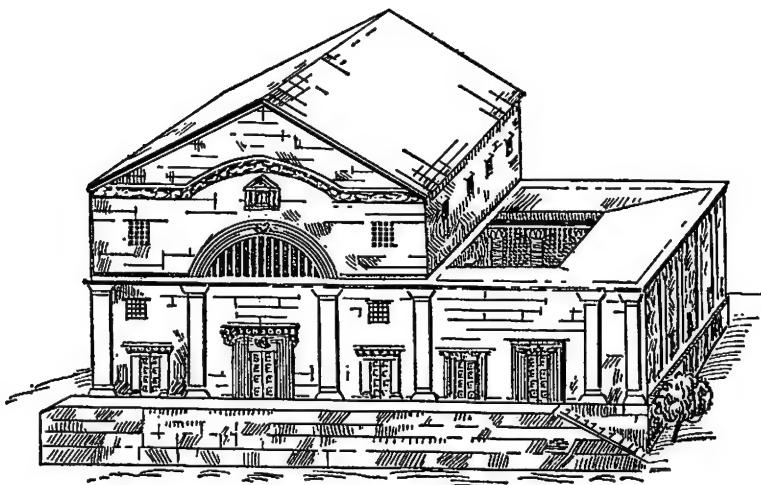
In time, two great religious parties developed among the Jews: the Sadducees, who held conservative views about the Law, and the Pharisees, who represented a more flexible approach. The Sadducees stressed the observance of the Law in the Pentateuch, while the Pharisees accepted it in addition to the oral interpretations which grew up around it. These interpretations were written in the Talmud.

The Sadducees seem to have emerged from those Jews who sympathized with Greek culture. They were priests who inherited their position at the Temple in Jerusalem. They received large portions of the sacrifices as well as the money gained by selling animals for the sacrifices. They grew wealthy. They favored a broad international policy and liberal relations with the Greeks and Romans. References to them are found in the life of Jesus (cf. Mark 11:15-18; 11:27-35; 12:18-27; 14:55-65; Luke 20:27-40).

The Pharisees probably descended from "the pious" of the time of Mattathias. Their great concern was in fulfilling the Torah in daily life. We see some of their position in the Gospels (cf. Luke 15:1, 2; Mark 7:1-16; Luke 6:1-4; Matthew 23:2-6; 15-36).

### *The Synagogues*

After the Exile, education took place in the synagogues, where the sacred books were read and interpreted. By the close



of the first century B.C. the center of Jewish thought and life in whatever land Jews lived was the synagogue. No one really knows exactly where and when the first Jewish synagogue was built. The Greek word *synagōge* means an assembly of Jews for prayer and Scripture study, or the building where such an assembly was held. Quite probably it was created by some of the Jews who had been carried away as captives in Babylon. Here they were far away from their beloved Temple and they needed a place to read the writings of their prophets and others. At that time, they had not accepted these materials as holy writings; nevertheless, they studied them along with such newer ones as Second Isaiah and Ezekiel.

In foreign lands, the synagogue became the Jewish center of worship and religion. It helped the Jews to remain faithful to their religion and to worship God as they had in Palestine. The synagogue was in no sense considered the dwelling place of God. No sacrifices or priestly services were provided, but the Law was read and interpreted there.

There were synagogues in many towns and cities in the time of Jesus. It is said that there were several scores of them in Jerusalem alone. In reading Matthew 13:54, Mark 6:2, Luke 4:16, and Luke 6:6 we find references to some of these synagogues in the time of Jesus. Evidences of old synagogues in foreign lands have been found. One was dedicated to Ptolemy III (246-221 B.C.) in Egypt; another, located in Corinth, would

perhaps go back to the time of Paul. A synagogue of the third century A.D. has been excavated at Dura-Europas on the Euphrates River. Its walls are decorated with paintings of biblical scenes.

Synagogues were customarily built in the highest available locations so that they would rise above the other buildings. Usually oblong in shape, they were ornamented with Jewish symbols such as the seven-branched candlestick. One synagogue which has been found in modern times had three doorways facing westward, and in front of them was a portico supported by columns.

There was a platform in the middle of the synagogue so that the person who read from the scrolls of the Law or who spoke to the people could easily be heard. The pulpit, called the *almemar*, had open sides and was approached by several steps. The desk was covered with rich drapery.

Beyond this platform, at the east end, the synagogue had an ark for the scrolls of the Law and other sacred books of the Old Testament, which were kept in linen cloths and in a case. In front of this, hung a curtain.

The men sat in the space on either side of the pulpit, while the women sat above in a gallery by themselves. The chief seats of the synagogue were in front of the ark, facing the people. Men called elders, who were held in the highest honor, sat in these seats. The other people sat in rows, one behind the other, all with their eyes turned toward the elders and toward the Holy Place. They probably sat on the floor.

These earliest synagogues were places for training the people in the religious laws. In addition to these, other laws were created to help Jews to be more faithful in their religion. The elders sat in the synagogue also on the second and fifth days of the week to judge people and to decide punishment for the offenders.

A man called a ruler looked after the service of worship on the Sabbath day (cf. Luke 13:14 and Mark 5:22) in the synagogue. It had six parts:

1. The men recited the Shema (Deuteronomy 6:4-9; 11:13-21; Numbers 15:37-41).
2. Prayer was offered by someone chosen by the ruler of the synagogue. The people listened silently and repeated

"Amen" at the close. The person who prayed stood in front of the ark.

3. Parts of the Law from the Old Testament were read from a large scroll kept in the ark. On the Sabbath at least seven persons were called upon by the rulers of the synagogue to read a few verses from the Law. Any man of the congregation could be chosen to read (cf. Acts 13:15). After each reading there was a benediction.

4. Parts of the Prophets from the Old Testament were read (see Luke 4:16-20).

5. A sermon followed the reading from the Law and the Prophets. The preacher was seated during his sermon (cf. Luke 4:20-29).

6. A blessing concluded the service.

Though people have worshiped God in trees and stones, on high places, in arks, before images, in temples, synagogues, and churches, it is important to remember that God is spirit and that the place or the method of worship is not nearly so important to God as the way people live together and love him and his will. The spirit of goodness and of love counts more in the worship of God than offerings and ceremonies (cf. John 4:19-25).

When the devoted followers of Jesus began to study his teachings and preach to Gentiles (people who were not Jews), they had to meet in homes, and gradually they began to build churches. At first these were much like synagogues. Later, their architecture resembled Roman law courts. Churches built in this style are called basilicas.

### *The Message of Jonah*

Now it is well to remember that many Jews forgot some of the noble religion of their prophets. They forgot to become missionaries to other peoples. Often they were proud of their own race and of their religion and showed prejudice toward other races and peoples. They rejoiced to think that God punished their enemies. They felt delight in revenge upon those who had wronged them.

Two or three hundred years before Jesus was born, a Jew wrote a story which gave the Jews a great vision of God. We do not know the name of this remarkable teacher but we have

his message in a book called Jonah, which is the name of a man. It is a kind of parable. This story of Jonah was probably written about the fourth century B.C. to satirize Israel for her unwillingness to fulfill her God-given mission to make Yahweh known to the rest of the world. Her suffering had been to this end (cf. Isaiah 52:13ff.). During the Exile, the Jews were told by Second Isaiah that they were to be the servant of God and to bring the nations to know him (cf. Isaiah 52:13-15).

According to the author of Jonah, Yahweh commanded him to go to Nineveh to warn the people against their evil ways. Jonah refused to go, and fled in a ship to try to escape the anger of Yahweh. A terrific storm at sea frightened the sailors and they rudely awakened Jonah to pray to his God to save them all. Soon the sailors discovered that the storm had been sent because Jonah was running away from the work of Yahweh.

The storm grew so terrible that the sailors decided to throw Jonah into the sea. Then the sea became calm. At the same time a great fish appeared and swallowed Jonah. After three days it cast Jonah out on land. Jonah then went to Nineveh and began to warn the people against their wickedness. He built himself a booth outside the city and waited for Nineveh's destruction, but when he discovered that Yahweh was not going to destroy the people of Nineveh, he became very angry. A vine which covered his booth and shaded it died from the scorching east wind. Jonah became even more angry. Then Yahweh said to him:

You pity the plant, for which you did not labor, nor did you make it grow, which came into being in a night, and perished in a night. And should not I pity Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also much cattle? (Jonah 4:10-11).

Perhaps there was a real person named Jonah who lived four or five hundred years before this story was written. The writer of this book was not concerned about teaching the Jews the history of this man who had lived so long ago, but he borrowed the name Jonah (which means dove) to show the Jews that they should teach even their enemies to know and to worship God. In a few words, this is what the writer was trying to tell the Jews through this unusual story:

Yahweh sent the "Dove" (the Jews) with a message to another country, but she was not willing to go and tried to run away from her task. Then she was punished by being swallowed up in the Babylonian exile, just as Jonah was swallowed up by the whale. In order to teach her a lesson, God marvelously saved her life, and helped her to escape so that she still might carry out her work to bring all the world to know about her God. Finally the "Dove" did try to help the foreign people a little. But just as soon as she saw them become sorry for their evil ways and turn to God, she was angry because he did not punish and destroy them. Through this story the writer thus tried to make the Jews feel ashamed of such selfishness in their worship of God.

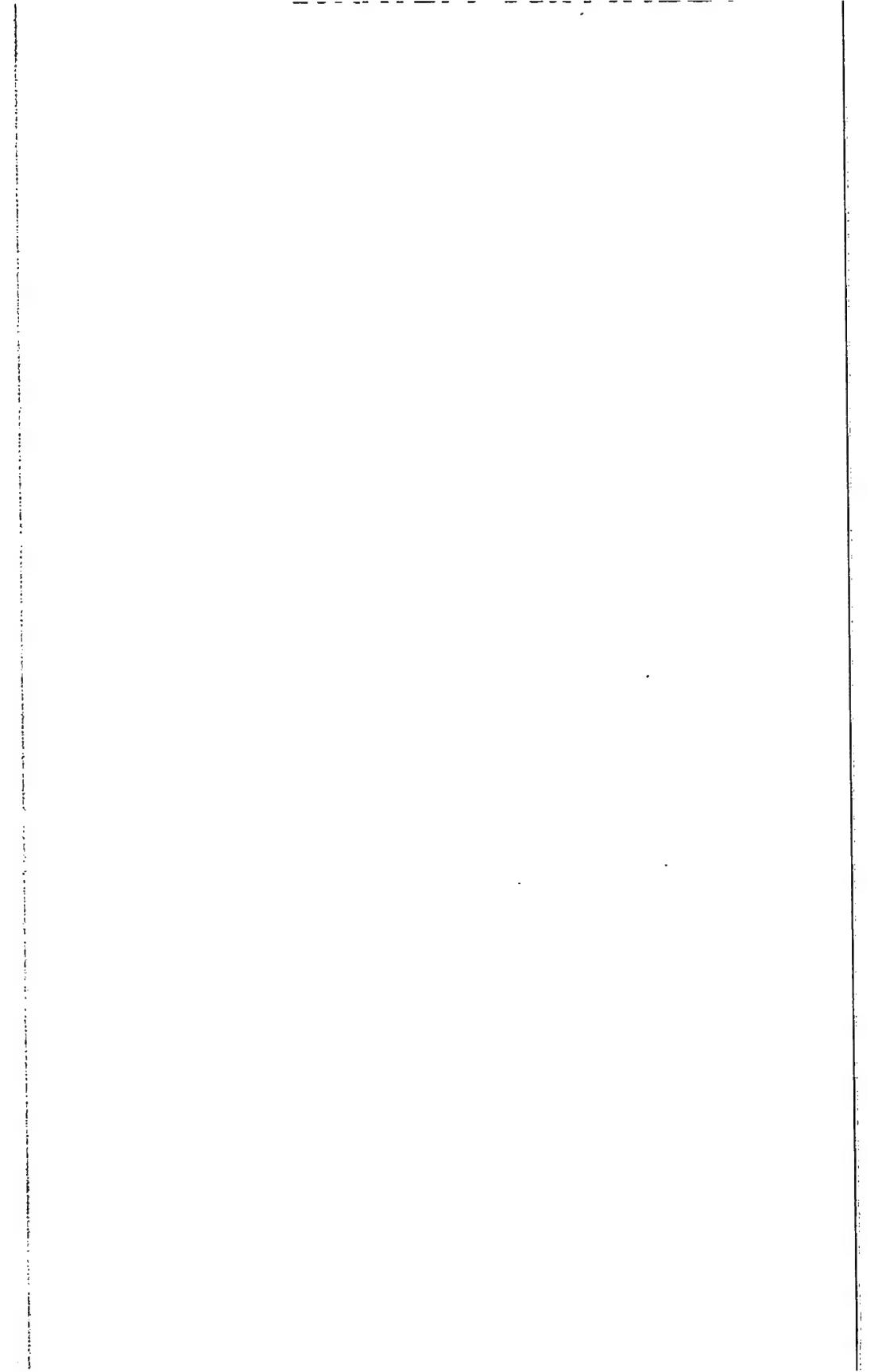
Second Isaiah once told the exiled Jews that there would be a time when they would tell all the world about their God. He said:

How beautiful upon the mountains  
are the feet of him who brings good tidings,  
who publishes peace, who brings good tidings of good,  
who publishes salvation,  
who says to Zion, "Your God reigns" (Isaiah 52:7).

A few great Jewish prophets realized that their God was the God of all people, and that it was their high privilege to help other people of the world to know God and grow to be like him.

*VI*

*The Making  
of the  
Old Testament*



19

*Writing  
the  
Old Testament  
(Part I)*

AFTER THE HEBREWS BECAME UNITED as a nation and were settled in Canaan, it seems perfectly natural that they should have begun to keep records (cf. 1 Kings 11:41; 14:19; 15:31; and 22:39). This was perhaps around 950 B.C. Other countries, such as Egypt, kept such records. In Canaan a most suitable system of writing had been found. During the monarchy, the original traditions of the Hebrews were doubtless written down in the Canaanite-Phoenician alphabet. This writing had reached a fairly stable form before the Hebrew tribes entered Palestine. Of course there were dialects and changes in the characters as time passed, but there was now an alphabet of twenty-two letters, and books could be written.

After their exile in Babylon, we have learned that the Jews ceased to speak Hebrew and instead used Aramaic. This language, spoken in Syria, was carried across the Near East by the Persian Empire in the 6th to 4th centuries B.C. The Hebrew language, however, continued to be the written language and was regarded as the sacred language to be used for most religious writings.

*Difficulty of Understanding Hebrew History*

The books in our Old Testament cover the story of a people during many hundreds of years. We have noticed again and again how the Hebrews changed and sometimes grew more mature in some of their religious ideas. At times, changes in

their thinking were written into new records, and finally several different records were combined. For example, in Genesis, the first book of the Old Testament, we have the writings of unknown authors whom we call J, E, and D blended together by P, or the priests. In Genesis 1 and 2 are two stories of creation. The later ideas of P come in the first chapter of Genesis, and the primitive story of an earlier writer of creation is in the second chapter. *The Bible, a New Translation*, by James Moffatt, shows the different writings.

Of course, when the biblical authors put the writings together and rearranged them, they did not make footnotes to tell which writer had first written a certain part. Therefore we depend upon scholars who can recognize the differences in the Hebrew language in which these books were first written. There are other differences, such as names of places and ideas. But, because these varied writings have been combined in parts of our Bible, we must understand that no one can commence at the beginning of the Bible and expect to find events in the order in which they were first written or thought out. Even more important is it for readers of the Old Testament to know that the religious ideas and customs of the Hebrews are not to be found in the Bible in the order in which they grew and developed.

We may compare what two writers in different periods say about the same event:

*The J Record* (between 950 B.C.  
and 850 B.C.)

"But the Jebusites, the inhabitants  
of Jerusalem, the people of Judah  
could not drive out" (Joshua 15:  
63).

*The J Record*

Joseph is sold into slavery by his  
brothers (cf. Genesis 37:25b-28).

*The P Record* (about 500 B.C.)

"And the men of Judah fought  
against Jerusalem and took it and  
smote it with the edge of the  
sword" (Judges 1:8).

*The E Record* (about 750 B.C.)

Joseph is kidnapped by the Midian-  
ites (Genesis 37:28-30).

Hebrew or Jewish authors wrote for their own people, not for us today. They used poems, myths, legends, folk tales, and laws to teach their own understanding of the work of Yahweh at a certain definite time, not merely to review past history. Authors did not hesitate to change older stories in order to express their own ideas. If this is carefully remembered, then

people who read the Bible may understand why there are so many repetitions and why there are disagreements between events and ideas which are repeated in different parts of the Bible. In summary, we must remember that the Bible is a library of many books, written by many different authors on different occasions. To most of the original writings additions and changes were made by later writers.

The library we know as our Old Testament was probably a thousand years in its writing. Much of it took form after the Exile (538 B.C.). It has become the most sacred of all books to the Jews. This same library is also sacred to Christians and to Muslims (those people all over the world who reverence Mohammed as their great prophet). Christians also believe that God was making himself known to the Hebrews and the world.

### *Storytellers Instead of Storybooks*

Sumerians, Accadians, Egyptians, Canaanites, Hebrews, and other people in the long past asked questions just as people do today. They wanted to know how the world began, how man was created, and how life began on the earth. They asked why there is suffering and why man has to work so hard. In their stories we find some of their answers to these questions. Probably the Hebrews heard many of these stories and sayings from the neighboring people around them — the Sumerians, Accadians, Babylonians, Egyptians, and Canaanites. As the people told them over and over for hundreds of years, quite naturally parts of the stories were changed and new ideas began to be woven into them. Religious tales, originally told about Baal of the Canaanites or the god Marduk of the Babylonians or about some other gods, were changed and told by the Hebrews about their God. How long this change went on we do not know, but it is fairly certain that stories were told for many centuries before they were written. We have already seen this in the flood stories.

Some of the oldest materials in the Old Testament are called "myths" (stories in which divine beings are prominent). We find a small example of these in Genesis 6:1-4. Myths of ancient peoples are poetic, imaginative attempts of man to explain his world. They are his science. Myths portray God with human features, such as talking, walking, being angry, or changing his

mind. Much of this quality is found in the early chapters of Genesis.

Probably the oldest parts in our Bible are some of the poems about war. Very ancient war and march songs may be found in the following references: The Song of Miriam (Exodus 15:21); eternal war with Amalek (Exodus 17:16); taunt song on the Amorites (Numbers 21:27-30); song of the well (Numbers 21:17f); song of Deborah (Judges 5). The old battle songs are very cruel and barbaric and quite unlike the spirit of poems written hundreds of years later, but they show how primitive the people were at first.

### *Laws Change as the Hebrews Develop*

Another old part of our Bible is the section which contains some of the Hebrew laws. When the priests began to arrange the Pentateuch (after 500 B.C.), they said that Moses gave the laws to the Hebrews or that Yahweh gave them to Moses and so they were passed on to the Hebrews.

Careful study of the Bible shows that Moses could not have given all of these varied laws. The laws reveal different periods of time and ways of living. Some are the very primitive laws of nomads, others are for farmers. Some are cruel, others are noble and remind us of Jesus. Because the Hebrews thought of Moses as rescuing them and freeing them from Egyptian tyranny, they came to think that Moses gave them most of their laws. Since history was not written down during the hundreds of years the Hebrews lived in the desert, before they settled in Canaan, it was difficult to remember how and when all the traditions, customs, and laws had started.

Frequently ancient people have said that their laws were given to them by the gods. Some Babylonians believed that their laws were given to their great ruler Hammurabi (about 1700 B.C.) by the sun-god Shamash. The Greeks likewise considered that they had received many of their laws from the gods. So we find the Hebrews teaching their children that Yahweh had given Moses many of their laws.

Usually laws begin where there are problems to be decided. If the new rule or law seems sensible, then it is repeated. As the Hebrews left their desert life to live in Palestine with strange neighbors, new customs and new laws were needed.

These Canaanitish neighbors were more civilized than the first Hebrews. They had been learning much from the Sumerians and Babylonians for centuries. Probably the Hebrews also learned about old Babylonian laws and customs from them.

One of the ancient Semitic law codes may be found in Exodus 21-23. Here are the beginnings of a religion that grew and changed into a high and noble one. In this code are directions concerning slaves (Exodus 21:2,20); the treatment of strangers (Exodus 23:9,25); the treatment of widows and orphans (Exodus 22:22); justice toward the poor (Exodus 23:6); and the service of Yahweh. Later, the prophets brought a far higher conception of devotion to God.

From earliest times the law of the desert demanded "life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burning for burning, wound for wound, stripe for stripe" (Exodus 21:23b-25). This law lingered among the Israelites, who never forgot their desert beginnings. "Life for life" was the desert law of blood revenge, which expressed the sacredness of family ties. The whole clan was responsible for each of its members and the god of the tribe required restitution for the loss of any one of its worshipers. If a person in the clan killed his relative, the other people of the clan drove him away (Genesis 4:14) or killed him (2 Samuel 14:4-7). To appease the god, the dead man's family was required to kill any one outside their own clan who had killed one of their members. In this ancient viewpoint we have noted that the blood of the slain person cried to his deity from the ground (cf. Genesis 4:10) unless it was covered (cf. Job 16:18; Isaiah 26:21).

In their most primitive days, the Hebrews considered it necessary, when they were aroused to white heat against an enemy, to conquer and destroy him. They believed that this hatred was shared by their God and so the cruel massacre of an enemy became a sort of religious duty (cf. 1 Samuel 15:3, 8).

Then they utterly destroyed all in the city, both men and women, young and old, oxen, sheep, and asses, with the edge of the sword (Joshua 6:21).

Under Canaanite influence revenge was modified by the decision of the king (cf. 2 Samuel 14:8-10) and the right of

asylum given to an unintentional manslayer (cf. Exodus 21:13; Numbers 35:12-34). In an account of Joab as a murderer, King Solomon decreed death (cf. Exodus 21:14; 1 Kings 2:28-34). Later laws in Israel decreed blood revenge in cases of deliberate murder (cf. Deuteronomy 19:11-13).

We begin to see changes in the laws as in the Holiness Code (Leviticus 17 — 26), written about 550 B.C.

You shall not hate your brother in your heart, but you shall reason with your neighbor, lest you bear sin because of him (Leviticus 19:17).

This code was included later in the Pentateuch by the priestly editor. Here we notice that once again a code is said to have come from Moses. The Holiness Code shows an advance in the way to treat people.

You shall not take vengeance or bear any grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord (Leviticus 19:18).

### *The Ten Commandments*

Perhaps the Hebrew laws that people have heard most often mentioned are the Ten Commandments. If we read the laws in the Old Testament more carefully, we find that there are several sets of commandments, some of them much older than the Ten Commandments. It is interesting to discover that Jesus stressed two commandments (Mark 12:29-31). Paul stressed but one law of love in Romans 13:8-10.

Since many writers at different periods in the history of the Hebrews wrote down laws, it is helpful to notice the changes which were made. It is important to realize that people in the Bible were guided by God in terms of their own devotion and understanding. As their devotion and understanding of God grew, his Spirit spoke more clearly to them.

The oldest one of the codes of laws said to have been given by Yahweh to Moses may be read in Exodus 34:14-28. This is sometimes called "The Ten Commandments of J," because J was one of the earliest writers (between 950-850 B.C.) of Hebrew history. It seems to be a very old code of laws, because it is related to the needs of a wandering people.

The Ten Commandments of "J" are something as follows:

1. Thou shalt worship no other god. (Yahweh is seen as a jealous god. The people still believed in many gods.)

2. Thou shalt make thee no molten gods.
3. The feast of the Passover thou shalt keep.
4. None shall appear before me empty-handed.
5. Six days thou shalt work, but on the seventh thou shalt rest.
6. Thou shalt observe the feast of ingathering.
7. Thou shalt not offer the blood of my sacrifice with leavened bread.
8. The fat of my sacrifice shall not remain until the morning.
9. The firstlings of thy flocks thou shalt bring unto Yahweh thy god.
10. Thou shalt not seethe a kid in his mother's milk.

Nearly all of these laws are concerned with the ritual of worship. Such ritual may have been the chief concern of nomadic people, or perhaps it was borrowed from the Canaanites. After the Hebrews had settled in Palestine and become an agricultural people, new law codes were needed. Probably it was hundreds of years after the time of Moses that our famous Ten Commandments, found in Exodus 20:3-7, developed. These laws are first recorded by the author of the Holiness Code about 550 B.C. In order to impress upon the Hebrews their importance, the writer says:

And Mount Sinai was wrapped in smoke, because the Lord descended upon it in fire; and the smoke of it went up like the smoke of a kiln, and the whole mountain quaked greatly. And as the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder, Moses spoke, and God answered him in thunder (Exodus 19:18, 19).

Then follow the laws which this later writer says were given to Moses:

1. I, Yahweh, am your god.
2. You shall have no other gods.
3. You shall not invoke the name of your god for evil.
4. Remember to keep the Sabbath holy.
5. Honor your father and mother.
6. You must not commit murder.
7. You must not commit adultery.
8. You must not steal.
9. You must not bear false witness.
10. You must not covet your neighbor's house.

### Comparing Biblical Laws

If we compare the later laws with the earliest ones, we will notice in the second code that God seems to demand that his followers serve him through good conduct. In the oldest code Yahweh demanded offerings and special ceremonies of worship. When the Hebrew people came to understand God's requiring noble conduct, they had progressed a long way from their more primitive worship. In this connection it is interesting to read what the later Hebrews said about sacrifices: Psalm 51:16,17; Micah 6:6-8. Compare 1 Samuel 15:3,8; Exodus 21,23; Joshua 6:21 and Matthew 5:38-45. To see the changes in the Hebrew understanding of God's will in their laws, it is useful to compare different writers with each other and also with the sayings of Jesus in Matthew 5.

J:	E:	D:	A Writer	Holiness Code
Exodus 34: 10-36	Exodus 20: 23 to 23:19	Deuteronomy 5:6-21	after the Exile: Exodus 20:3-17	Leviticus 19: 1-37

Teachings that Jesus gave hundreds of years later show the highest level of progress.

You have heard that it was said, "An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth." But I say to you, Do not resist one who is evil. But if any one strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also; and if any one would sue you and take your coat, let him have your cloak as well; and if any one forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. Give to him who begs from you, and do not refuse him who would borrow from you.

You have heard that it was said, "You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy." But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and send rains on the just and on the unjust (Matthew 5:38-45).

We find Jesus teaching people to love each other, even their enemies, rather than to take revenge or to try to get even with another.

It is necessary that man learn to recognize God's will and accept it. The person who receives God's spirit must be ready or fitted to do so. God's revelation comes to man when what is *true* and what is *right* have been found. All knowledge of truth and right is of God. People in the Bible failed, were un-

prepared, and for many other reasons were limited in receiving all the truth. It is important to profit by the highest and noblest in the Bible. It is necessary to recognize some of the beginnings but always as a help in understanding the goal or the highest experiences of God (cf. Galatians 5:14). The people in the Bible were human beings with all manner of problems and limitations. It was into such lives that God entered. Each man's life is peculiar and special and therefore modern people dare not live a life of imitation. Each individual must come to know God for himself, seek his will in life as he faces it today (cf. Galatians 5:16, 25), and profit from the experiences of the biblical people. The Christian believes that he can find the most complete evidence of God's character in Jesus (cf. Hebrews 1:3).



20

*Writing*

*the*

*Old Testament*

*(Part 2)*

AFTER THE HEBREWS HAD BEGUN TO LIVE a more settled life in Palestine, it seems (between 950 and 850 B.C.) that an unknown Hebrew writer called the Judean or J gathered the various old stories, traditions, and poems together and prepared the first written record of the Hebrews. Much of his work is scattered through Genesis. Such writing took place during the period of the United Kingdom of David (1000-970 B.C.) and King Solomon (970-935 B.C.). Accounts of the patriarchal tribes, originally with little in common, were woven together by the J writer as the story of one tribal family. By this time, Yahweh must have been pretty well accepted by all of the Hebrew tribes as their God.

#### *The Message of J in the First Hebrew History*

In dramatic fashion, J told of the humble beginnings of twelve tribes, starting with Abraham (Genesis 12 – 33); of the preservation of the Hebrews in a time of famine in Egypt through Joseph; of their escape from Egypt under Moses; and of their conquest of Canaan (Exodus 1 – Judges 1). This was a religious record. Constantly the J author showed the lives of the Hebrews were guided, their battles fought, and their enemies conquered by their devotion to Yahweh. As we have seen, ancient songs, legends, current stories, and explanations of the origin of Canaanitish sanctuaries were woven together to tell of the glory of the Hebrews and of their great

God Yahweh (cf. Genesis 12:6,7; 13:18; 21:30,33; 28:10-22). J wrote as if Yahweh had ever been their God. J was filled with patriotism for his own people and the belief in their special relation to Yahweh. With all of this devotion to his own people, the author, however, did reveal many of their failings (cf. Genesis 12:19; 16:6; 25:29-34; 26:7-10; 30:37-43; Exodus 2:11-15). The Hebrews' deceit and assault against foreigners are shown, as these had been practiced in the desert. The J document shows the Hebrews of his time as serving also "the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell" (cf. Joshua 24:15).

Some of the unusual stories of J are these:

Creation — Genesis 2:4b-3:24.

First murder — Genesis 4:1-16

Origin of nomadic life — Genesis 4:17-26

Fall of divine beings — Genesis 6:1-8

The flood — Genesis 7:1-10, 12, 22, 23; 8:2b-3a, 6-12, 13b, 20-22

Descendants of Noah — Genesis 10:8-19, 21, 24-30

Tower of Babel — Genesis 11:1-9

### *E Writes Another History of the Hebrews*

Nearly two hundred years later (750 B.C.) in the Northern Kingdom of Ephraim, or Israel, a writer whom we call E wrote a record of the Hebrews that is in many ways quite similar to that written by the Judean or the J writer. A very noticeable difference is that E referred to God as Elohim but J preferred to call him Yahweh. E seems to prefer the name Amorite to Canaanite. The Accadians also used the name Amorite when referring to the nomads from the edges of the Syrian Desert.

These two distinct records of the Hebrews came about because in 933 B.C. the northern and southern groups of Hebrews divided, each having its own kings and distinct places of worship. Perhaps the E writer was a priest at Bethel. His record gives considerable information about practices of worship and does not seem critical of sacrifices. His criticism of calf worship in Exodus 32 may reflect the golden bull cult at Dan and Bethel. He shows the dangers of idolatry.

The E record begins with a story of Abraham and deals with

his life in Canaan but does not connect Abraham with Egypt. E idealizes Abraham and his descendants more than J.

*The E Record:*

Genesis 20:1-17  
21:12  
31:5-18  
42:13, 32

*The J Record:*

Genesis 12:10-20  
16:6  
30:37-43  
44:20

E also includes some Joseph stories (Genesis 37ff). Besides the difference in event and emphases, J and E each use distinctive words, or names. J uses "Sinai" and E uses "Horeb" (cf. 1 Kings 19:8). In the E stories, the Joseph tribes escape from Egypt first and thus become acquainted with Yahweh at Horeb. Physical appearances of God are generally avoided by E. God reveals himself in dreams and visions or as an angel from heaven.

Both J and E are agreed on the main events in the record of Moses. It may be that both knew of an epic poem or song which had been recited by the refugees from Egypt and passed along by the Hebrews in both the South and the North for several hundred years.

With E, Moses is a worker of miracles using a magic rod (see Exodus 7:20; 9:22,23; 10:12,13) and a brazen serpent (Numbers 21:4-9). The romantic side of the story of Moses has grown through the centuries, as seen in E's account of his birth and childhood (Exodus 2:2-10) and his death (Deuteronomy 34:5,6).

Perhaps E was conscious of the religious growth of his people, from the use of "teraphim" in the house (Genesis 31:19, 30-35) to the coming of Yahweh to Moses (Exodus 3:15-16).

The earliest Hebrew law code is recorded by E in Exodus 20:23 to 23:19, and the covenant ceremony in Exodus 21:1. It is J that gives the Ritual Decalogue in Exodus 34.

### *J and E Combined*

There were difficulties in having two histories of Israel, a northern and a southern one, each reflecting regional views. Finally the problem was solved about 650 B.C. by some Judean editors combining the J and E scrolls into a single document. It appears that these JE editors chose sometimes a story from J and at other times a story from E to weave into a single

continuous narrative. In some instances events of similar occasions from both the J and the E record were placed side by side. J was mostly used to record the old stories from creation down to Abraham. Beginning with Abraham, the J and E narratives were blended together. Many of the old stories about the conquest used by E are found in the books of Judges and Samuel. J is more prominent in the Saul and David stories. In the story of Joseph being carried off to Egypt, J and E are blended together in Genesis 37. The J and E records are scattered throughout the books from Genesis to Samuel. In Joshua it is difficult to know how much the JE editor revised the E scroll and how much he added from other sources. Some recognition by the reader of this fusion of these old records in parts of the first ten books of the Old Testament helps to explain variations in names, places, ideas, and emphases.

An illustration of this combining of two records may be understood by reading in Moffatt's translation the portion in square brackets, which represent E's history, and the portions printed in italics, which come from the J record. For example, J reports Joseph's being sold by his brothers to certain Ishmaelites traveling to Egypt, while E describes Joseph's being protected by his brother Reuben but stolen by the Midianites from the pit into which his other brothers had cast him.

*The man said, "They have gone from here; I heard them saying, 'let us move to Dothan.' Then Joseph went after his brothers, and in Dothan he found them. But they saw him at a distance and, long before he came up, they plotted to murder him. [They said to each other, "Here is the dreamer! Come on, let us kill him and fling him into one of the pits. We can say that a wild beast devoured him. Then we'll see what becomes of his dreams!"] When Judah heard this, however, he rescued him from their hands, saying, "No, we must not kill him outright." [Said Reuben, "Shed no blood; fling him into this pit out in the open, but no violence!" (his idea being to rescue him and restore him to his father). So when Joseph reached his brothers, they stripped him of his tunic (the tunic with long sleeves), and flung him into the pit, which was empty; there was no water in it. Then they sat down to their food.] (Genesis 37:17-25, Moffatt's Translation.)*

### *Books of the Prophets*

Among the greatest of the men through whom the Spirit of God came to the Hebrews, were the prophets. Their insights reflect God at work in them. There were several (Jeremiah

14:14) kinds of prophets. Different forms of communication with deity are described in the Bible, as shown in 1 Samuel 10:5-10; 19:20-24; 1 Kings 22:19-23; Numbers 12:6-8; Deuteronomy 18:10-14; 1 Samuel 9:1-10. The writers who pointed the way to God's truth most clearly were men like Amos, Hosea (750-744 B.C.), Jeremiah, the three authors of the Isaiah book, and Micah. Some of these prophets made changes such as those incorporated in the Deuteronomic Code and the Holiness Code (Leviticus 17—26). They greatly affected the religion of the Jews just before and during the Exile.

The greatest of the prophets living before the fall of the Northern Kingdom (722 B.C.) and the fall of the Southern Kingdom (586 B.C.) were Amos, Hosea, First Isaiah, Micah, and Jeremiah. In the book of Isaiah, we find the works of writers who lived at different periods. First Isaiah created much of Chapters 1—39 in the time of King Ahaz and King Hezekiah. Second Isaiah was a prophet of the Exile and wrote before the fall of Babylon in 538 B.C. (chapters 40 to 55). Third Isaiah wrote chapters 56—66 after the Temple was rebuilt.

In the books of the prophets we read of the struggles of the Hebrews in their relations with other nations and between their two kingdoms. In the midst of these events the prophets are able to discern God's will and point directions. There is a movement toward a purer worship of God and a recognition that the highest devotion to him is expressed in righteousness, justice, and goodness. Jeremiah spoke chiefly before the fall of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. Here is what Jeremiah said:

Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant which I made with their fathers when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant which they broke, though I was their husband, says the Lord. But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it upon their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And no longer shall each man teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, "Know the Lord," for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the Lord; for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more (Jeremiah 31:31-34).

Because the prophetic books were edited and assembled after the Jewish exile (586 B.C.) the stress on one God of the universe, which had by that time become recognized, was then added and appears in the text we find in our Bible. By the time of Second Isaiah it is clear that this prophet was leading the Jews to their highest vision of the God of the universe.

I am the first and I am the last;  
besides me there is no god.

I am the Lord, and there is no other,  
besides me there is no God;  
I gird you, though you do not know me (Isaiah 44:6b; 45:5).

“You are my witnesses,” says the Lord,  
“and my servant whom I have chosen,  
that you may know and believe me  
and understand that I am He.  
Before me no god was formed,  
nor shall there be any after me.  
I, I am the Lord,  
and besides me there is no savior . . .” (Isaiah 43:10, 11).

I made the earth,  
and created man upon it;  
it was my hands that stretched out the heavens,  
and I commanded all their host (Isaiah 45:12).

It is important to remember that the prophets were speaking to their own people in their own times and see the conditions which they and their people were facing. In this way the modern reader can better understand the prophets' vision of God and the meaning of their declarations. Some of them were trying to lead their people to justice and mercy as a substitute for animal and human sacrifices. We have seen that prophets like Ezekiel led them to Temple worship and its ceremonies.

### *The Deuteronomist Changes Worship*

It was a slow and uneven process for the Hebrews to change from their age-long customs of worshiping like other peoples around them. As already seen (about 621 B.C.) a new book of religious laws was published. Its name is Deuteronomy, which means “repeated law.” Every possible suggestion was made to purify the Hebrew religion of its old customs and beliefs. Sacrifices and festivals, it was urged, should be carried out only

in the Temple at Jerusalem. This writer, whom we call D, told the people to break down and to destroy all of their old altars, pillars, and images. He felt that the worship of Yahweh had been hindered by contacts with Canaanite worship. Polytheism was prevalent at many high places and temples. Here are some of his words:

You shall surely destroy all the places where the nations whom you shall dispossess served their gods, upon the high mountains and upon the hills and under every green tree; you shall tear down their altars, and dash in pieces their pillars, and burn their Asherim with fire; you shall hew down the graven images of their gods, and destroy their name out of that place. You shall not do so to the Lord your God. But you shall seek the place which the Lord your God will choose out of all your tribes to put his name and make his habitation there (Deuteronomy 12:2-5).

The Deuteronomic book is a kind of a sermon which attempts to make the old Mosaic religion relevant for the people of Judah. It reads as if Yahweh had given its many laws and rules in these great reforms to their long-ago hero, Moses. Probably some of these laws were changed from those that had grown out of a much older law (Exodus 34). Not all of the D laws are noble ones. There remains in some of them a spirit of revenge, even though the reformers were working to get justice. In cases of wrongdoing they still said, "Your eyes shall not pity; it shall be life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot" (Deuteronomy 19:21). The D writer believed that the Hebrews should destroy all of the Canaanites. He says, "You shall save alive nothing that breathes" (Deuteronomy 20:12-20). The Hebrew religion had not yet reached the level of Jesus' teachings about love and forgiveness and peace. D believed that Yahweh was interested only in the Hebrews, so when they went to their wars they expected Yahweh to help them to be victorious. Yahweh was their own special God. Other gods were for other people. Other nations could worship the stars, but Israel must not. In a later period there is an addition to this scroll. Probably the first clear statement in the Old Testament which denies the existence of other gods was made at that time, and it is found in Deuteronomy 4:35 and 39. We read, "The Lord is God in heaven above and on the earth beneath; there is no other."

This would seem to be earlier than Isaiah's great monotheistic declarations (cf. Isaiah 40-55).

Love of God became central in the D code. D gave the Hebrews their famous Shema which all faithful Jews have repeated in their worship for centuries, even to the present day. Shema means "hear." It is the first word of this ancient law which is found in Deuteronomy 6:4-9. Jesus quoted a part of it as one of the first and most important commandments. It begins:

Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord; and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might . . . (Deuteronomy 6:4, 5).

According to the D code, the Passover and other festivals were now to be celebrated only in Jerusalem. The Temple at Jerusalem was cleansed and made ready for the worship of Yahweh alone (2 Kings 22:14 to 23:3). The influence of the D code became very great; it became the law of the land. It was the standard by which the authors of books from Judges to Kings condemned old practices. However, there are scarcely any views of D to be found in the first four books of the Old Testament.

About the time this D writing was completed (621 B.C.), it came to the attention of King Josiah (2 Kings 22-23). He appeared astonished to learn of these new laws, and he hastened to put them into practice according to the admonishment in Deuteronomy 6:17. The following references show the nature of his reforms:

1. Central worship at Jerusalem — 2 Kings 23:4-5,8,12-13, 15-16,19; Deuteronomy 12:1-7.
2. Passover in the Temple (once held in homes) — 2 Kings 23:21-23; Deuteronomy 16:1-8.
3. Elimination of astral worship — 2 Kings 23:4-5,11; Deuteronomy 17:3.
4. Elimination of sacred poles and pillars — 2 Kings 23:4,6,7, 14; Deuteronomy 12:3; 16:21-22.
5. Elimination of sacrifices of children to Molech — 2 Kings 23:10; Deuteronomy 18:10.
6. Elimination of magic and divination — 2 Kings 23:24; Deuteronomy 18:11.

7. Admittance of rural priests or Levites to the Temple of Solomon in Jerusalem – 2 Kings 23:9; Deuteronomy 18:6-8.

### *The Holiness Code (Leviticus 17 – 26)*

More than a hundred years after the D code, while the Jewish leaders were in exile, the law of revenge was changed. The prophet Ezekiel taught that God would be the judge of people's sins. He and other Jewish leaders said that people were responsible for their own actions; nobody could be saved by the goodness of another.

Some of the Jews made another law code called the "Holiness Code," (Leviticus 17–26) between 550 and 500 B.C. The noblest part of it is greatly superior to some of the spirit of the Deuteronomistic Code. In this later code God is more clearly a God of justice and of goodness. The Holiness Code reminds us of Jesus when it says:

You shall not hate your brother in your heart, but you shall reason with your neighbor, lest you bear sin because of him. You shall not take vengeance or bear any grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord (Leviticus 19:17, 18).

There are other laws here showing human concern: Leviticus 25:14-17, 25-29, 35-38, 44-46). In these days after the exile, the Old Testament writings began to show still more of the effects of the prophets and of the suffering of the Jews. The inner spirit as well as the outer deeds are considered important (Ezekiel 36:26, 27, 28). Of course the author of the Holiness Code was thinking more about love among the Jews than of any love toward foreigners. Much later, Jesus joined together this law of love for one's neighbor as equally important with the law to love God. One law said "You shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord" (Leviticus 19:18), and the other law said "You shall love him [the stranger] as yourself . . . I am the Lord your God" (Leviticus 19:34). These two laws were also united in a book called *The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*. Jesus believed that the two ideas belonged together. He taught that true love for God requires that one should love not only his neighbor but his enemies as well (Matthew 5:43-48, Luke 6:27-36).

Ezekiel tried to make changes in the Hebrew worship. In the Holiness Code the Jews were forbidden to kill their own animals for sacrifice as they had been doing for centuries. The new law demanded that priests should do it for them. The prophet Ezekiel had emphasized that priests should hold positions of importance in the Temple and depend on the Levites to do the menial work. Hebrew worship grew very formal and separate from practical living. Priests began to teach that Yahweh's sacrifices and worship were holy or separate. In this way it was hoped to keep the worship of God apart from the worship of the gods around them. Instead of Hebrew people killing their own sacrifices, the sacrifices were brought on special occasions to the Temple and prepared and offered by the priests.

The work of Ezekiel and the new Holiness Code of laws prepared the way for vast numbers of laws and ceremonies of worship that finally made the religion of the Jews almost a burden to them. By the time Jesus was teaching in Palestine, he saw some of the religious leaders paying so much attention to these laws and to the Temple worship that they forgot to be kind and helpful to people around them. He taught that man's spirit and attitude toward others were more important to God than ceremonies. Some of his criticism of elaborate worship may be found in Mark 7:1-9; Luke 11:42-43; 14:1-6; 19:45-46.

### *Priestly Writers*

In the years after the exile, priests became the important leaders of the people. They were considered the representatives of God and spoke with much power. Because of their prominence, the priests compiled other codes of laws. They did this approximately between 550 and 450 B.C. Some of the old laws were joined to new ones. As writers in the past used history to teach their religious ideas, so once again the priests, or P (as we shall call these priestly writers) rewrote the Hebrew story to teach their ideas of worship. Ezekiel had great influence on them. P wanted to impress upon the Jews the importance of observing certain festivals, ceremonies, and laws. P developed definite Sabbath observances (for example, see Exodus 31:12-17). We see this also in the emphases in Genesis 1, the story of creation, by P, who often used stories to teach.

P believed in one God, but to him God seemed very exalted and far off. His writings show that polytheism has passed in the worship of the Jews. Obeying certain ceremonial laws became the most important way to worship God.

In order to encourage the Jews to worship God in the Temple of Jerusalem, P wrote detailed descriptions of a tabernacle and its ceremonies (Exodus 25-29 and 35-40) which he said had existed in the days of Moses. We begin to see that Moses is regarded as the founder of the Hebrew system. The curious thing about these stories of the tabernacle is that P wrote as if the plans had been dictated by Yahweh. These were the ideas P wished the Jews to follow in the Temple. It is doubtful that there ever was such a tabernacle or such elaborate worship of Yahweh in the desert during the time of Moses. Perhaps there had been a crude tent for Yahweh much like those in which desert people themselves lived.

The plans of P seem to be a blueprint for the Jews in their restored Temple after their exile. Moses had become the great hero of the Jews. So the priestly writers probably rewrote the stories of the past in order to teach new beliefs, and placed them under Moses' authorship. People always seem to reverence the past and as the Jews idealized Moses more and more, they grew to think that their beliefs had been given to them by Yahweh through his faithful servant Moses. Such ideas and customs became increasingly important to the Jews and continued even during and after the days of Jesus. The chief reason for the later interruption in Temple worship was the destruction of Herod's Temple by the Roman ruler, Titus, 70 A.D.

The priestly writers had probably completed the Pentateuch by 400 B.C. The Pentateuch became a national code, meant to govern the whole life of the Jewish people. Its name means "five rolls" or "the book in the five rolls." Like other ancient codes it was considered as given by God. Proper conduct and observance of laws were essential in doing the will of God. Such relations to God were basic in the Pentateuch, marking a change from earlier attitudes.

Formerly, to be cleansed of sin, sacrifices were offered at the Temple of Jerusalem (cf. Deuteronomy 32; 2 Samuel 21). Sin had been regarded as pollution. It could infect a whole neigh-

borhood — even the crops, animals, and the land. The cure was cleansing by sacrifice. Since it could be concentrated in a person or place, it was also laid on a scapegoat (see Leviticus 16:20-22).

In time, however, some Jews came to regard sin as a personal disobedience of an individual to the will of God.

Against thee, thee only, have I sinned,  
    and done that which is evil in thy sight,  
Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward being;  
    therefore teach me wisdom in my secret heart.  
Create in me a clean heart, O God,  
    and put a new and right spirit within me.  
For thou hast no delight in sacrifice;  
    were I to give a burnt offering, thou wouldest not be pleased.  
The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit;  
    a broken and contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise (Psalm 51:4a, 6, 10, 16, 17).

It is God's spirit rather than bloody sacrifice that can heal sin (Isaiah 1:13, 14, 16, 17).

More and more the Jewish priests urged the people to obey the religious laws and ceremonies. Obedience to the Law was considered an important way to honor God. Finally the numerous laws became a burden to religious Jews (Galatians 3:1-14). If one wished to be truly righteous, he needed to study these laws day and night. The devotion of a loyal Jew is expressed in a Psalm:

Oh, how I love thy law!  
    It is my meditation all the day (Psalm 119:97).

### *Job and Suffering*

About the fourth century B.C., and after the Jews had returned to their homeland, an unknown author wrote a remarkable book on the problem of suffering and thus hurled a challenge against legalism. It is a great poem set in dramatic form.

The legendary Job appears as a "blameless and upright" Jew who fears God and resists evil. The drama begins with Satan's skeptical remarks to God about Job's selfish motives in serving him: "Does Job fear God for nought?" So God gives Satan permission to test Job's devotion. The plot describes a series of catastrophes which are sent upon Job. He loses his family, his

property, his health, and, above all, his reputation among his friends. The story reveals the kind of advice which Job receives from three friends who come to comfort him as he sits in wretchedness and misery on the refuse heap of a village. After Job's tragic lament (Job 3) his friends insist that he must have sinned, while Job persists in declaring his innocence. The accusations by his friends finally lead Job to accuse God of perverting justice, although he declares his devotion to the Law (Job 31). Then, out of a whirlwind, comes God's reply to Job (Job 38-41). The mystery of suffering and the mystery of life lead Job to conclude that it is impossible to judge God by man's standards. The problem of suffering remains unsolved, since an omnipotent God rules the universe and man must keep up his confidence in God even in the presence of suffering.

### *Lost Writings*

Some Hebrew writings are lost to us. We read of the Book of Jashar in Joshua 10:13 and 2 Samuel 1:18. The Book of the Acts of Solomon is mentioned in 1 Kings 11:41. The Chronicles of the Kings of Judah is referred to in 1 Kings 14:29. All of these are lost.

### *The Chronicler Writes a History*

Some years after the preparation of the elaborate code of the Priestly writers, the Chronicler prepared another history of the Jews (about 300 B.C.). The books are called 1 Chronicles and 2 Chronicles. A few scholars think that these books were written by Ezra. The writer related all events to the Temple and its services in Jerusalem. In many ways these records differ from the ideas of the J, E, or D writers.

### *Daniel*

Already we have noted that about 332 B.C., the famous Greek ruler Alexander the Great invaded Canaan. At this time he was bringing most of the civilized world under Greek control. An old story tells us that the high priest of Jerusalem put on his most beautiful robes and went out to welcome Alexander. Probably the Jews had learned that it was useless to oppose him, so they welcomed him. After these conquests, Greek civilization surrounded the Jews. Greek temples, the-

atres, and gymnasiums were built in many towns. Greek ideas and customs came to be mixed with Jewish ones.

Then came the cruel Syrian ruler Antiochus Epiphanes IV. He set up Greek altars, and Jews were ordered to sacrifice to Greek gods.

On every side of the sanctuary they shed innocent blood;  
they even defiled the sanctuary.  
Because of them the residents of Jerusalem fled;  
she became a dwelling of strangers;  
she became strange to her offspring,  
and her children forsook her.  
Her sanctuary became desolate as a desert;  
her feasts were turned into mourning,  
her sabbaths into a reproach,  
her honor into contempt (1 Maccabees 1:37-39).

Faithful Jews were horrified, especially when Antiochus entered their Temple, set up an altar to Zeus, and offered swine upon it. According to Jewish law, this animal is unclean and unfit for use.

But many in Israel stood firm and were resolved in their hearts not to eat unclean food. They chose to die rather than to be defiled by food or to profane the holy covenant; and they did die. And very great wrath came upon Israel (1 Maccabees 1:62-64).

A book called Daniel was written in these terrible days to comfort the Jews. It is one of the late books in the Old Testament. Modern readers find it difficult to understand because the writer tells of strange visions and uses symbols that only Jews of that time would have understood. For example, one interpretation of Daniel 7:4-8 holds that when Daniel refers to Babylon, he speaks of it as a lion; Media is like a bear; Persia is like a leopard; Greece is a terrible and powerful beast; Antiochus is a little horn. The writer of Daniel did not sign his own name to the book but used the name of a famous man of the past and wrote as if it were that well-known man who was speaking to the Jews. The author was saying to the Jews that some day God would come and establish his kingdom and save them.

### *Other Writings*

Chart IV gives the dates of other books as well as the dates of some passages inserted into older books of the Old Testament

after the time of the Chronicles. The prophetic books were also put into final form by Jewish editors and became accepted as sacred writings by 200 B.C. Some miscellaneous writings were collected toward the end of the second century B.C.

It is well to be reminded that Protestants usually have thirty-nine books in their Old Testament. The early Christians had these same books as well as fourteen or fifteen more, known as the Apocrypha (books of dubious authenticity). The Apocryphal books were written in the period between 300 B.C. and A.D. 100 and were used by the Jews of Alexandria, but not by the Jews in Palestine. These were turbulent times for the Jews, partly due to their foreign rulers and partly due to conflict between their own leaders. Troubled times led to apocalyptic (symbolic) writings cloaked as the utterances of an Enoch, a Moses, an Abraham, or an Ezra. Tobit, Judith, and Susanna are romantic tales. 1 and 2 Maccabees are a dramatic account of the Jewish struggle for religious freedom under Syrian domination. Bel and the Dragon is a myth. The Prayer of Manasses is a liturgy which once was used in some churches. There are more books. The apocryphal books were included later in the Bibles of the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches.

A flood of literature grew. Then the Christians began to add other writings. The need to declare which books were authoritative or sacred demanded a decision. A Rabbinic Assembly held in A.D. 90 at Jamnia (on the coastal plain) pronounced definitely on the books which were considered to be Jewish Scriptures. Judaism was forced to renounce the apocalyptic writings. It was most difficult to decide about the inclusion of the Song of Songs, Ecclesiastes, and Esther. They were finally accepted. In this collection of ancient writings in the Old Testament we find evidence of the views of Judaism after the Exile.

All of the writings which we call the Old Testament are called *Holy Scriptures* by the Jews. The word "Testament" means "covenant."

### *The Dead Sea Scrolls*

One of the most thrilling discoveries about certain Jews and their writings was made in 1947. Arab Bedouins entered

caves located in the cliffs northwest of the Dead Sea and here found some old scrolls, preserved by being enclosed in pottery jars. When scholars saw them, and many more found later, it was pretty well agreed that they were very old, some as old as the last century before Jesus and the first century A.D. Until 1947, none of the old Hebrew manuscripts of the Bible were earlier than A.D. 850.

At least 382 manuscripts were represented by the fragments from one cave alone. About 100 of them are biblical manuscripts. Some of the books (scrolls) are in many copies (14 of Deuteronomy, 12 of Isaiah, 10 of Psalms). Almost complete copies of Psalms and of Isaiah were found in one cave. Later, more manuscripts were found in other caves including the scroll of Esther.

Also discovered and excavated near the great cliffs overlooking the shore of the Dead Sea is a monastery dated between 140 B.C. and A.D. 67. Some other buildings were found just a mile away. The men and a few women and children who lived in this monastery seem to have been Jews who had separated themselves from the Jews of Jerusalem and were critical of the priests there. This Qumran community devoted itself to the study of the Old Testament. The people lived simply and had special ceremonies of bathing and baptism. It is believed that they were the Essenes of Jesus' time.

The Dead Sea scrolls, which came from this community, were placed in caves about A.D. 68 while the Romans battled with a Jewish revolt. Their value to scholars today is enormous. The Qumran community is interesting because it reaches back into the time of Jesus, and before. The scrolls are being translated and will give scholars considerable help in understanding the Old Testament texts and in more accurate translating of some of it. Many biblical passages will become clearer and sometimes longer as these ancient sources are studied. All of these manuscripts were copied by hand; errors could be made. The scroll of Isaiah shows little essential change, however, from copies made 900 to 1000 years later. The scrolls found at the Dead Sea reveal that a copyist at times wished to protect the holiness of God: in 2 Samuel 20:1 a copyist wrote "every man to his tents" in place of "every man to his gods," the latter quotation being a remnant of primitive religion.

There are sayings in the scrolls which resemble those in the Gospels. These give us clues as to the thinking of certain dedicated Jews in the time of Jesus. For example, we read in John's Gospel:

All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made (John 1:2b).

In the *Manual of Discipline* of the Qumran Community (1 Qr. S. 11:10-11):

. . . for judgment is God's,  
and from his hand is blamelessness of conduct.  
By his knowledge everything comes to pass;  
and everything that is he establishes by his purpose;  
and without him it is not done.<sup>1</sup>

Passing along the Bible from people to people has been very complicated because people who did not know Hebrew needed to have it translated into their own language. Changing it into another language often creates inaccuracies and changes of meaning. Many Greek-speaking Jews lived in Alexandria, Egypt. One translation was made for such people. It was done under the Greek ruler, Ptolemy Philadelphus (246-245 B.C.) and was called the *Septuagint*. Many scholars (some say seventy) worked on this Greek translation. When it is compared with the Dead Sea Scrolls which were produced near the time of the Septuagint, there seem to be but few errors. These translators included the Apocryphal books and some other writings. Many Christians were Gentiles whose native language was Greek. These had never known the Old Testament and for that reason they were glad to have a Greek translation. Later, Latin and other translations were made.

<sup>1</sup> Millar Burrows, *The Dead Sea Scrolls* (New York: The Viking Press, 1955), p. 388.

*Chart 4. Order of the Old Testament (Oral and Written)*

1. Pre-Mosaic era. Stories, songs, and proverbs, composed while the Hebrews were nomads or were in Egypt.
2. Before 1200 B.C.
  - (1) War and march songs and poems: Genesis 4:23f; Exodus 15:21; 17:16; Numbers 21:14; 21:17, 27-30.
  - (2) Proverbs, riddles, fables: 1 Samuel 24:13; Judges 14:14, 18; 9:7-15.
  - (3) Oracles: Numbers 23.
  - (4) Laws – the “J decalogue”: Exodus 34; the Canaanite Civil Code.
3. 1200-1000 B.C.
  - (1) Poems: Genesis 9:25-27; Joshua 10:12b-13a; Judges 5; 14:14, 18; 15:16; 1 Samuel 18:7; 2 Samuel 1:18-27; 3:33f.
  - (2) Oral sources of S, J, E, and ancient parts of Judges.
4. 1000-900 B.C.
  - (1) Poems: Genesis 49; Numbers 24:3-9, 15-19; 2 Samuel 20:1; 1 Kings 8:12f.; Psalms 24:7-10  
Book of Song  
Book of the Wars of Yahweh.
  - (2) Prose: S, parts of Judges, early source of Samuel, parts of the records of Solomon.
5. 900-722 B.C. Ephraim or Northern Kingdom
  - (1) Poetry: Numbers 23:7-10, 18-24; Deuteronomy 33; Psalm 45.
  - (2) Laws: Deuteronomy 27:16-25.
  - (3) Prophetic: Amos and Hosea.
  - (4) Records: History of the Kings of Israel, stories of Elijah and Elisha, the great E religious story (750 B.C.)
6. 900-700 B.C. Judah or Southern Kingdom
  - (1) Records: The J religious story (850 B.C.), parts of the History of the Kings of Judah and of the Temple.
  - (2) Prophets: Isaiah (738-700 B.C.) and Micah (about 722 B.C.)
7. 700-600 B.C.
  - (1) Poems: Nahum 1:10ff.; Numbers 12:6-8.
  - (2) Records: J, E (650 B.C.), parts of Samuel, parts of Kings of Judah and of the Temple; first record of Kings (about 600 B.C.).
  - (3) Prophets: Jeremiah (626-585), Zephaniah, Habakkuk, the Deuteronomic Code found in 621 in the time of Josiah (most of Deuteronomy 5 – 26, 28).
  - (4) Exodus 22 – 23, the Ten Commandments.
  - (5) Proverbs 25 – 27; Psalm 104.

8. 600-500 B.C.

- (1) Poetry: Lamentations, some Psalms and Proverbs.
- (2) Narratives: Portions from Genesis to Kings.
- (3) Laws: Holiness Code (Leviticus 17 – 26).
- (4) Prophets: Ezekiel, Second Isaiah (Isaiah 40 – 55), Haggai, Zechariah 1 – 8, Micah 6:1 to 7:6.
- (5) Job (after Exile).

9. 500-400 B.C.

- (1) Poetry: Deuteronomy 32; Exodus 15:1-18, some Psalms and Proverbs.
- (2) Narrative: Nehemiah, Ruth.
- (3) Laws: The Priestly arrangement, the Pentateuch and its canonization (400 B.C.) Final edition of the Covenant Code.
- (4) Prophets: Isaiah 56 – 66, Obadiah, Malachi, parts of Isaiah and Jeremiah.

10. 400-300 B.C.

- (1) Poetry: Song of Songs, some Psalms, Proverbs; Job 32 – 37; Nahum 1:1-9; Habakkuk 3; 1 Samuel 2:1-10.
- (2) Narrative: Jonah, some of the Chronicle of Jeremiah and of books from Joshua through Kings.
- (3) Apocalyptic: Isaiah 24 – 27; Zechariah 9 and of the Minor Prophets.

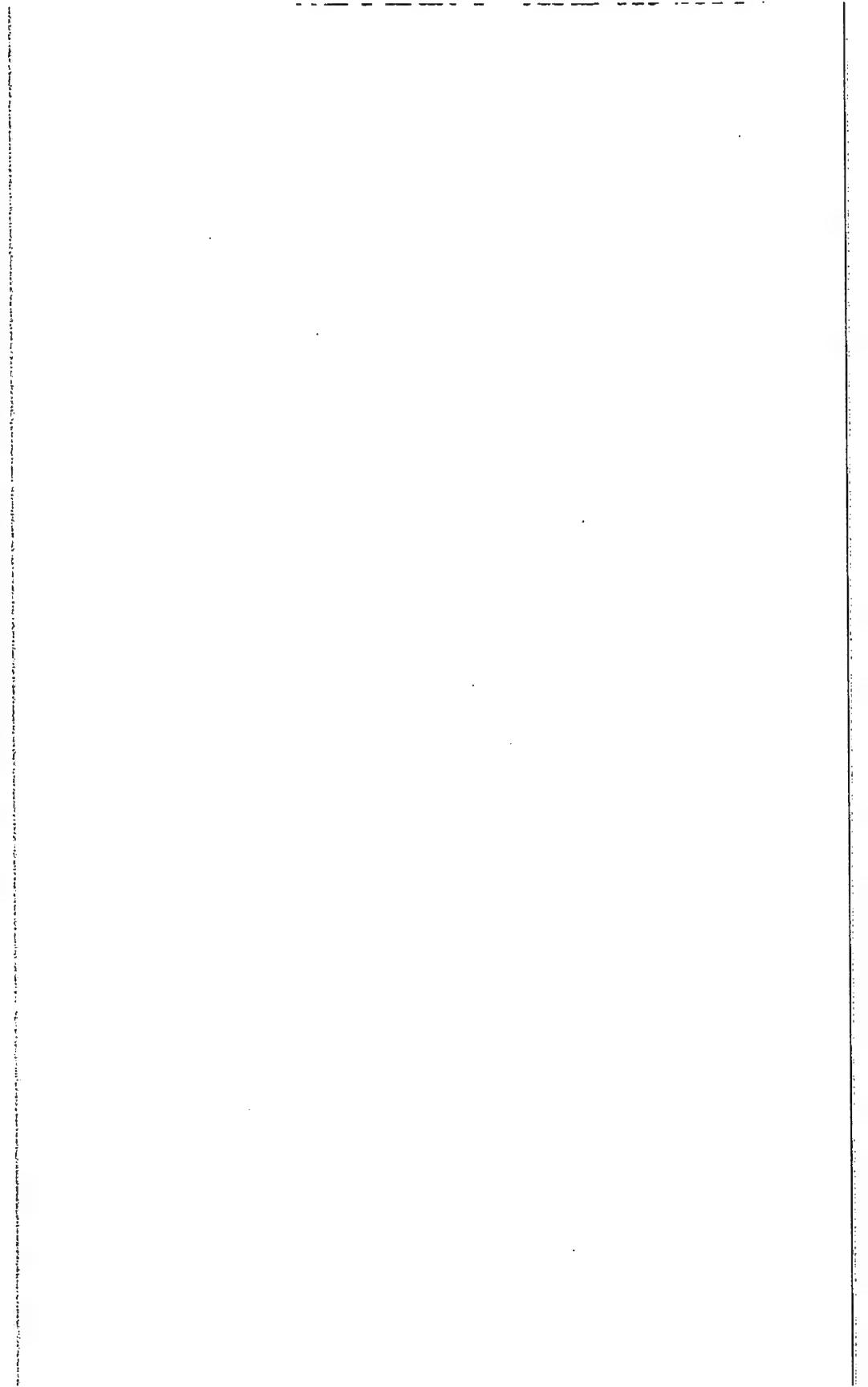
11. 300-200 B.C.

- (1) Poetry: Song of Songs, some Psalms, Proverbs.
- (2) Narrative: Chronicles, parts of Ezra-Nehemiah and of books from Joshua through Kings.
- (3) Apocalyptic: Isaiah 24 – 27; Zechariah 9 – 14; parts of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel; the canonization with Joshua and Kings about 200 B.C.

12. 200-100 B.C.

- (1) Poetry: Maccabean (44; 74; 79; 83), final edition of Psalms.
- (2) Wisdom: Ben Sirach's Ecclesiasticus (about 180 B.C.), Ecclesiastes (about 150 B.C.) and possibly Wisdom of Solomon (about 100 B.C.).
- (3) Narrative: Daniel 1-6, Judith, Esther, and possibly Tobit, Ezra (1 Esdras), 1 Maccabees.
- (4) Apocalyptic: Daniel 7 – 12.<sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Adapted from Robert H. Pfeiffer, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers © 1941), pp. 21-23. Reprinted with the permission of Harper & Row, Publishers.



*The Psalmist  
and  
God*

SOME OF THE MOST BEAUTIFUL EXPRESSIONS and feelings of devotion to God are found in the poems and songs of the Old Testament. Here is an example:

Praise the Lord, all nations!  
 Extol him, all peoples!  
 For great is his steadfast love toward us;  
 and the faithfulness of the Lord endures for  
 ever.  
 Praise the Lord! (Psalm 117).

Perhaps the best place in the Old Testament to get an understanding of the minds, experiences, and spirit of the ancient people of Israel is in the Psalms. The writer of Psalm 107 praises God for his care for all manner of persons, such as farmers, sailors, the sick, the captives, the prisoners, and those who travel. Here we see their sufferings, their afflictions, their dangers, and their labors. In the face of their misery and distress God has helped them, and for this the Psalmist overflows with gratitude to God.

Let the redeemed of the Lord say so,  
 whom he has redeemed from trouble  
 and gathered in from the lands,  
 from the east and from the west,  
 from the north and from the south.

Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble,  
 and he delivered them from their distress;

Let them extol him in the congregation of the people,  
and praise him in the assembly of the elders.

Whoever is wise, let him give heed to these things;  
Let men consider the steadfast love of the Lord.

(Psalm 107:2, 3, 6, 32, 43).

Psalms 135 and 136 review the ancient struggles of the Hebrews and remind them that God's "steadfast love endures for ever."

Praise the Lord.

Praise the name of the Lord,  
give praise, O servants of the Lord,  
you that stand in the house of the Lord,  
in the courts of the house of our God!  
Praise the Lord, for the Lord is good;  
sing to his name, for he is gracious!  
For I know that the Lord is great,  
and that our Lord is above all gods.  
Blessed be the Lord from Zion,  
he who dwells in Jerusalem!  
Praise the Lord! (Psalm 135:1, 2, 3, 5, 21).

In Psalm 137, the exiles in their sadness ask how they can sing to their God in a strange land (586-538 B.C.). Their hatred of their captors is sometimes expressed with horrible cruelty.

O daughter of Babylon, you devastator!  
Happy shall he be who requites you  
with what you have done to us!  
Happy shall he be who takes your little ones  
and dashes them against the rock! (Psalm 137:8, 9).

In Psalm 79, the writer cries out in anguish over the power of the heathen and their destruction. The author calls on God for revenge, a spirit unlike noble religion.

O God, the heathen have come into thy inheritance;  
they have defiled thy holy temple;  
they have laid Jerusalem in ruins.  
Pour out thy anger on the nations  
that do not know thee,  
and on the kingdoms  
that do not call on thy name!  
Return sevenfold into the bosom of our neighbors  
the taunts with which they have taunted thee,  
O Lord! (Psalm 79:1, 6, 12).

*Many Writers of the Psalms*

Though poetry is old among the Hebrews, most of the psalms seem to have been composed between 500 and 200 B.C., after some of the Hebrews had returned to Judea (about 538 B.C.) from their exile in Babylon. We have seen that much of the Old Testament was written or rearranged into its present form during this same period. Priests had arranged the Pentateuch and inspired devotion to the Law and to the Temple. When the Jerusalem Temple was rebuilt in 516 B.C., there was need for special songs and hymns.

There appear to be at least five different collections in the present Book of Psalms. The authors of these hymns and songs are unknown to us today. Their devotion to God and to his law are clear and strong and have inspired multitudes of Jews and Christians until the present day.

Probably the present arrangement of the 150 psalms was done sometime after 200 B.C. There were centuries of influence upon the Hebrews by their neighbors. The Assyrians, the Babylonians, and the Egyptians used poems about their gods. The Canaanites, whose land the Hebrews invaded and finally made their own, had hymns to their gods. Scholars believe they can see influences of these earlier poems on the poetry of the Hebrews.

*Psalms in Temple Worship*

When the Jews returned to their native land from Babylonia (538 B.C.), they began rebuilding their life in this poor little country which had suffered from such dreadful destruction during the wars with the Babylonians in 598 and 586 B.C. Their Temple lay in ruins, but by 516 B.C. they had built a shabby new Temple and had resumed their worship in it.

It seems likely that some of the psalms were created for such worship and were sung responsively by tenors and basses. Perhaps boy sopranos and altos sang in the best of the choirs.

In Psalm 107 we find a refrain occurring four times. It was doubtless sung by the choirs or by the congregation.

O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good;  
for his steadfast love endures for ever! (Psalm 107:1).

Psalm 92 has the title "A Song for the Sabbath." It declares:

It is good to give thanks to the Lord,  
 to sing praises to thy name, O Most High;  
 to declare thy steadfast love in the morning,  
 and thy faithfulness by night (Psalm 92:1, 2).

This psalm suggests that their singing be done to the accompaniment of musical instruments:

to the music of the lute and the harp,  
 to the melody of the lyre (Psalm 92:3).

Stringed instruments are mentioned frequently in the psalms: harps, psalteries and an "instrument of ten strings."

Praise the Lord with the lyre,  
 make melody to him with the harp of ten strings!  
 Sing to him a new song,  
 play skilfully on the strings, with loud shouts (Psalm 33:2,3).

It is good to give thanks to the Lord,  
 to sing praises to thy name, O Most High;  
 to declare thy steadfast love in the morning,  
 and thy faithfulness by night,  
 to the music of the lute and the harp,  
 to the melody of the lyre.  
 For thou, O Lord, hast made me glad by thy work;  
 at the works of thy hands I sing for joy (Psalm 92:1, 2, 3, 4).

I will sing a new song to thee, O God;  
 upon a ten-stringed harp I will play to thee (Psalm 144:9).

Cymbals were also used by the choirs of Levites, who seem to have been prominent as Temple singers. These cymbals were "sounding" and "loud clashing," according to Psalm 150. This psalm mentions the use of varied musical instruments in the praise of God.

Praise the Lord!  
 Praise God in his sanctuary;  
 praise him in his mighty firmament!  
 Praise him with trumpet sound;  
 praise him with lute and harp!  
 Praise him with timbrel and dance;  
 praise him with strings and pipe!  
 Praise him with sounding cymbals;  
 praise him with loud clashing cymbals! (Psalm 150:1, 3, 4, 5).

Evidently horns or trumpets of several kinds were used in religious worship. The ancient ram's horn continues to be used

to this day in Jewish services at the New Year Festival and at the close of the Day of Atonement.

Some of the psalms are full of praise to God and would seem to have been sung by Hebrew worshipers. One group of the psalms is called "Songs of Ascent." These psalms appear to have been sung by pilgrims climbing up the road to their Temple in Jerusalem for special festivals (Psalms 120-134).

The joy of these Jewish travelers can be felt in Psalm 122:

I was glad when the said to me,  
    "Let us go to the house of the Lord!"  
Jerusalem, built as a city  
    which is bound firmly together,  
to which the tribes go up,  
    the tribes of the Lord,  
as was decreed for Israel,  
    to give thanks to the name of the Lord.  
Pray for the peace of Jerusalem!  
    "May they prosper who love you!  
Peace be within your walls,  
    and security within your towers!" (Psalm 122:1, 3, 4, 6, 7).

Jews came to Jerusalem from their distant homes to celebrate one or more of their great festivals. These weary travelers must have been full of joy when at last they saw Jerusalem high above them and the beautiful walls of their second Temple. At the first sight of it they sang:

To thee I lift up my eyes,  
    O thou who art enthroned in the heavens! (Psalm 123:1).

The Jews are reminded of their return from exile and the restoration of their city of Zion.

When the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion,  
    We were like those who dream.  
Then our mouth was filled with laughter,  
    and our tongue with shouts of joy;  
then they said among the nations,  
    "The Lord has done great things for them."  
The Lord had done great things for us;  
    we are glad (Psalm 126:1, 2, 3).

Lift up your hands to the holy place,  
    and bless the Lord!  
May the Lord bless you from Zion,  
    he who made heaven and earth! (Psalm 134:2, 3).

Processionals of singers are mentioned in Psalm 68 while "players on instruments" of many kinds accompanied them.

Thy solemn processions are seen, O God,  
the processions of my God, my King, into the  
sanctuary —  
the singers in front, the minstrels last,  
between them maidens playing trimbrels (Psalm 68:24, 25).

The ceremonies at the Temple of Jerusalem must have been impressive and inspiring as men joyfully sang and played instruments with many sounds, and processed in dignity.

### *God as Creator*

What did the writers of the psalms think about God? Certainly they are clear that God is the Creator and Ruler of life and the world. Sometimes God seems to them to be in the form of a man, especially in Psalm 18.

Then the earth reeled and rocked;  
the foundations also of the mountains trembled  
and quaked, because he was angry.  
Smoke went up from his nostrils,  
and devouring fire from his mouth;  
glowing coals flamed forth from him.  
He bowed the heavens, and came down;  
thick darkness was under his feet.  
He rode on a cherub, and flew;  
he came swiftly upon the wings of the wind.  
He made darkness his covering around him,  
his canopy thick clouds dark with water.  
Out of the brightness before him  
there broke through his clouds  
hailstones and coals of fire.  
The Lord also thundered in the heavens,  
and the Most High uttered his voice,  
hailstones and coals of fire.  
And he sent out his arrows, and scattered them;  
he flashed forth lightnings, and routed them.  
Then the channels of the sea were seen,  
and the foundations of the world were laid bare,  
at thy rebuke, O Lord,  
at the blast of the breath of thy nostrils (Psalm 18:7-15).

To the writers of many psalms God has made the world so that man may work with him. God has revealed himself and

his purposes to the Hebrews. God is ever at work in the events of people.

Whom have I in heaven but thee?

And there is nothing upon earth that I desire  
besides thee.

My flesh and my heart may fail,

but God is the strength of my heart and my portion  
for ever (Psalm 73:25, 26).

Because my steadfast love is better than life,

my lips will praise thee.

So I will bless thee as long as I live;

I will lift up my hands and call on thy name.

for thou hast been my help,

and in the shadow of thy wings I sing for joy.

My soul clings to thee;

thy right hand upholds me (Psalm 63:3, 4, 7, 8).

The heavens tell of the glory of God, says the writer of Psalm 19:

The heavens are telling the glory of God;  
and the firmament proclaims his handiwork.

Day to day pours forth speech,  
and night to night declares knowledge (Psalm 19:1-2).

Everything around these Hebrew writers spoke to them of God. In their beautiful poems, the writers seem to pour out their hearts to him. God is everywhere and related to everything that happens. In Psalm 139 we find the meaning of God. Now it is clear that God can be everywhere—not limited, as he was pictured in earlier years (cf. Genesis 18:20-21).

O Lord, thou hast searched me and known me!

Even before a word is on my tongue,

lo, O Lord, thou knowest it altogether.

Whither shall I go from thy Spirit?

Or whither shall I flee from thy presence?

If I ascend to heaven, thou art there!

If I make my bed in Sheol, thou art there!

If I take the wings of the morning

and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea,

even there thy hand shall lead me,

and thy right hand shall hold me.

If I say, "Let only darkness cover me,

and the light about me be night,"

even the darkness is not dark to thee,

the night is bright as the day;  
for darkness is as light with thee.  
I praise thee, for thou art fearful and wonderful.

Wonderful are thy works!  
Thou knowest me right well;  
How precious to me are thy thoughts, O God!  
How vast is the sum of them!  
Search me, O God, and know my heart!  
Try me and know my thoughts!  
And see if there be any wicked way in me,  
And lead me in the way everlasting!

(Psalm 139:1, 4, 7-12, 14, 17, 23, 24).

### *Trust and Devotion to God*

Psalm 27 is a superb expression of trust and devotion to God. This spirit makes the psalm of great value to the modern worshiper as well.

The Lord is my light and my salvation;  
whom shall I fear?  
The Lord is the stronghold of my life;  
of whom shall I be afraid?  
When evildoers assail me,  
uttering slanders against me,  
my adversaries and foes,  
they shall stumble and fall.  
Though a host encamp against me,  
my heart shall not fear;  
though war arise against me,  
yet I will be confident.  
Teach me thy way, O Lord;  
and lead me on a level path  
because of my enemies.  
I believe that I shall see the goodness of the Lord  
in the land of the living!  
Wait for the Lord;  
be strong, and let your heart take courage;  
yea, wait for the Lord! (Psalm 27:1, 2, 3, 11, 13, 14).

Psalms 90 and 91 are others which give expression to devotion to God in great beauty. Here is strength in the Jew's devotion.

Lord, thou hast been our dwelling place  
in all generations.  
Before the mountains were brought forth,  
or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world,

from everlasting to everlasting thou art God.  
 Let the favor of the Lord our God be upon us,  
 and establish thou the work of our hands upon us,  
 yea, the work of our hands establish thou it. (Psalm 90:1, 2, 17).

He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High,  
 who abides in the shadow of the Almighty,  
 will say to the Lord, "My refuge and my fortress;  
 my God, in whom I trust."

You will not fear the terror of the night,  
 nor the arrow that flies by day,  
 nor the pestilence that stalks in darkness,  
 nor the destruction that wastes at noonday.  
 Because you have made the Lord your refuge,  
 the Most High your habitation,  
 no evil shall befall you,  
 no scourge come near your tent (Psalm 91:1, 2, 5, 6, 9, 10).

*Psalms of Thanksgiving*

Many psalms express the gratitude and praise of their author to the one and only God. Their feelings are expressed well in Psalm 118:1:

O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good;  
 his steadfast love endures for ever! (Psalm 118:1).

I will extol thee, my God and King,  
 and bless thy name for ever and ever.

Every day I will bless thee,  
 and praise thy name for ever and ever.  
 Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised,  
 and his greatness is unsearchable.

My mouth will speak the praise of the Lord,  
 and let all flesh bless his holy name for ever and ever. (Psalm 145:1, 2, 3, 21).

Praise the Lord!

Praise the Lord, O my soul!

I will praise the Lord as long as I live;

I will sing praises to my God while I have being. (Psalm 146: 1, 2).

Thou hast multiplied, O Lord my God,  
 thy wondrous deeds and thy thoughts toward us;  
 none can compare with thee!

Were I to proclaim and tell of them,  
 they would be more than can be numbered (Psalm 40:5).

The intense devotion to God by the author is beautifully expressed in Psalm 116:

I love the Lord, because he has heard  
 my voice and my supplications.  
 Because he inclined his ear to me,  
 therefore I will call on him as long as I live.  
 Gracious is the Lord, and righteous;  
 our God is merciful.  
 The Lord preserves the simple;  
 when I was brought low, he saved me.  
 For thou hast delivered my soul from death,  
 my eyes from tears,  
 my feet from stumbling (Psalm 116:1, 2, 5, 6, 8).

*What Does God Require?*

After their exile in Babylon, the first five books of the Old Testament containing the Law became a stern teacher for the Jews. Psalm 1 describes the writer's attitude toward the Law.

Blessed is the man  
 who walks not in the counsel of the wicked,  
 nor stands in the way of sinners,  
 nor sits in the seat of scoffers;  
 but his delight is in the law of the Lord,  
 and on his law he meditates day and night (Psalm 1:1, 2).

In Psalm 19, the Law is praised as a "delight" and not a burden.

The law of the Lord is perfect,  
 reviving the soul;  
 the testimony of the Lord is sure,  
 making wise the simple;  
 the precepts of the Lord are right,  
 rejoicing the heart;  
 the commandment of the Lord is pure,  
 enlightening the eyes;  
 the fear of the Lord is clean,  
 enduring for ever;  
 the ordinances of the Lord are true,  
 and righteous altogether.  
 More to be desired are they than gold,  
 even much fine gold;  
 sweeter also than honey  
 and drippings of the honeycomb.  
 Moreover by them is thy servant warned;  
 in keeping them there is great reward (Psalm 19:7-11).

Other views about outward forms of devotion to God are stressed. Like some of the prophets, a psalmist declares:

For thou hast no delight in sacrifice;  
    were I to give a burnt offering, thou wouldst not be pleased.  
The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit;  
    a broken and contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise  
        (Psalm 51:16, 17).

In a similar mood, the author of Psalm 40 is more concerned with the obligation of man to do the will of God.

Sacrifice and offering thou dost not desire;  
    but thou hast given me an open ear.  
Burnt offering and sin offering  
    thou hast not required.  
Then I said, "Lo, I come;  
    in the roll of the book it is written of me;  
I delight to do thy will, O my God;  
    thy law is within my heart (Psalm 40:6, 7, 8).

God prefers justice, mercy, and righteousness from men. Psalm 139 stresses the inner spirit of man:

Search me, O God, and know my heart!  
    Try me and know my thoughts!  
And see if there be any wicked way in me,  
    and lead me in the way everlasting! (Psalm 139:23, 24).

Devotion to God is the way for man to meet life and its problems.

When my soul was embittered,  
    when I was pricked in heart,  
I was stupid and ignorant,  
    I was like a beast toward thee.  
Nevertheless I am continually with thee;  
    thou dost hold my right hand.  
Thou dost guide me with thy counsel,  
    and afterward thou wilt receive me to glory.  
Whom have I in heaven but thee?  
    And there is nothing upon earth that I desire besides thee.  
My flesh and my heart may fail,  
    but God is the strength of my heart and my portion for ever.  
But for me it is good to be near God;  
    I have made the Lord God my refuge,  
        that I may tell of all thy works (Psalm 73:21-26, 28).

Though there are many views about devotion to God and

his nature the psalms reflect the most intense reverence and devotion to God in all kinds of activities of the individual and the nation. God is supreme.

*VII*

*From the  
Old Testament  
to the New*

*The Jewish Struggle  
for  
Independence*

THERE SEEMED TO BE NO END to the changes in the rulers over the little country of the Jews in Judea. The Jews lived under the Persians from 538 B.C. until 333 B.C. Then the Macedonians conquered the Persians, and in 333 B.C. Alexander the Great entered Jerusalem. Under him the whole Jewish world was brought under the influence of Greek thought and culture. This Greek influence extended from 331 B.C. to 63 B.C. Customs, buildings, and many other influences were encouraged. Alexander the Great gave the Jews much freedom, but he died in 323 B.C. and many troubles started because his generals divided his vast empire under three or four factions. The Ptolemies ruled from Egypt and the Seleucids ruled from Syria. Judea lay between them. From 301 B.C. until 198 B.C. the Jews were under the Ptolemaic power in Egypt. Then the Seleucids became dominant.

When the Seleucids began to rule over the Jews, there was at first a long period of toleration of their religion and practices. This was, however, drastically changed during the rule of the Seleucid king, Antiochus Epiphanes IV (175-164 B.C.). His interference in Jewish practices seems to have been due to a plan to increase taxes. He offered the position of high priest in Jerusalem to the highest bidder, and removed the High Priest Onias. Jason agreed to accept this office and to support the Greek program of Antiochus IV, precipitating a violent conflict with devout Jews. Jason built a gymnasium in Jerusalem

for the Jews who followed Greek customs. Devout Jews were horrified, and some of them organized a pious opposition known as the Hasidim. They fought long and hard against Greek customs being imposed on them. Antiochus IV then attacked directly the religious practices of the Jews, their customs, their observance of the Sabbath, and their Temple worship. Worst of all, the king set up a Greek altar to Zeus in the sacred Temple of God in Jerusalem. To enforce his plans, he stationed troops in Judea.

These outrages led to open revolt by the Jews. Conditions grew more terrible. Then Antiochus Epiphanes IV massacred many of the Jews, plundered their Temple, and controlled it (c. 168-165 B.C.). He desecrated it by his sacrifices of swine on the altar, forbade Sabbath worship on penalty of death, and transformed Jerusalem into a Greek city. For years the Jews had struggled to worship God according to the Priestly Law. Obedience to the Law of the Torah had become the most important consideration in their lives. These observances were central in their religion. Now they were outraged.

The Jews were led in their revolt by a devout priest, Mattathias. He and his five sons continued the struggle for years. Later, his eldest son, Judas, succeeded his father in a guerilla warfare against the armed forces of the Syrians until their general agreed to a treaty in 165 B.C. Then, on a great day in December, Judas entered the Temple of Jerusalem and reestablished the Jewish worship of God. Even to this present time, Jews celebrate this great day of religious freedom in the festival of Hanukkah or the Feast of Lights. By 161 B.C. another son, Jonathan, was made Jewish High Priest and this family (known as the Maccabees) came to rule the Jews for nearly a century. Jonathan's brother Simon succeeded him as ruler and high priest. In the Apocrypha there are two books of Maccabees.

John Hyrcanus (135-106 B.C.) followed his father Simon, but during his reign religious zeal died out and the worldly Sadducees assumed leadership in the Temple worship. It was John Hyrcanus who destroyed the Temple of the Samaritans on Mount Gerizim in the late second century B.C.

### *Jewish Religion Under the Romans*

There seemed to be no permanent peace for the Jews in the

little land of Palestine. By 63 B.C., the Romans ruled the land. Between 20 and 19 B.C., under Roman rule, Herod the King (37-4 B.C.) rebuilt the shabby Temple of Jerusalem, making it larger and grander than ever before. By doing so, Herod thought he would please the Jews. He called on their priests to do the work. It was finally finished in A.D. 64, long after the death of King Herod (cf. John 2:20). This was the Temple which Jesus knew and visited on festival days (Luke 2:41-52).

Though the Jerusalem Temple brought multitudes of Jews from a distance for sacrifices, the celebration of festivals, and the preservation of ancient beliefs, it was never an adequate expression of the prophetic side of the religion of the Jews. Sacrifices and the ritual involved at the Temple did not create a mature knowledge of the God of the universe.

Today it is of great interest to connect these closing years of Jewish history in Palestine, with the recent excavations of Qumran and Masada.

Steep cliffs above the Dead Sea in the region of Moab became a well-fortified outpost for the Jews under their Hasmonean High Priest, Jonathan, in the second century B.C. Later, King Herod saw its advantages and built himself a fortified palace at Masada. Recently archaeologists have uncovered Herod's mosaic floors, Greek columns, plaster-covered walls, frescoes, Roman baths, and great storehouses for grain, pulse, dates, oil, and wine at Masada. Here he could at times escape until his death in 4 B.C., soon after Jesus' birth. Then for sixty years Masada was used as a Roman garrison.

A group of Jews known as Zealots hoped to overthrow Roman rule in Judea. In A.D. 66, some Zealots brought their families (960 people in all) to live at Masada. For seven years this was a center for Jewish revolts against the Romans.

After the Romans destroyed Jerusalem and the beautiful Jewish Temple in A.D. 70, they began a long siege of Masada. The steep, rocky sides of this mountain made attack very difficult. The Roman commander Silva built a 300-foot rampart on the western side and placed an ironclad tower on top of it. From this platform he used a battering ram against the wall of Masada and also hurled torches of fire into the area. The Zealots finally found themselves in a hopeless position. Rather than surrender to the Romans, men bade goodbye to their

women and children, killed them, and finally killed themselves. Two old women and five children had hidden. They were the only Jewish Zealots left to tell this terrible story of Masada, later reported by the Jewish author Josephus.

A few miles north of Masada lived some Essenes in the special community of Qumran. When they saw the defeat of the Jews by the Romans they put their precious writings or scrolls into earthen jars and hid them in nearby rocky caves. Here these treasures remained until 1947 and onwards, when the so-called "Dead Sea Scrolls" began to be discovered, collected, and studied. Today, these ancient treasures are in museums in Amman and Jerusalem. In Jerusalem, in a museum called "The Shrine of the Book," is exhibited a marvelous old scroll of the book of Isaiah and other objects.

When the Jews lost their homeland and its sacred shrines Johanan ben Zakkai, a Pharisee and disciple of the great Jewish teacher Hillel, escaped the siege of Jerusalem (A.D. 70) by being concealed in a coffin. Later he requested Roman authorities to allow him to found an academy to study the Torah. Permission seems to have been granted to establish it at Jabneh (Jamnia is the Greek name). This was an ancient Philistine city, inhabited later by Syrians. Here a remnant of the Jewish community was preserved in Palestine. This group strengthened the foundations of the work of the rabbis and provided a Jewish center of learning in the land of Palestine. Other Jews were killed or had fled to many places and became a scattered people (referred to as the dispersion).

It was difficult for the Temple to serve the Jews who lived at a distance. Besides, the sacrifice of animals was hardly a way to lead the worshiper to truly spiritual worship (see John 4:19-25). Places of worship nearer to them would be better for this purpose than the Temple. Also, under Roman rule the Temple became a military stronghold, associated with pagan rule. The priests themselves often collaborated with their rulers and became quite worldly.

After the death of King Herod, the conflict between the Jews and the Romans grew until there was open rebellion. This led to a terrible war. The Roman Emperor Titus finally destroyed Jerusalem in A.D. 70. Herod's beautiful Temple was burned and permanently destroyed. Some of its treasures were taken

to Rome. Today the visitor in Rome may still see the triumphal arch of Titus decorated with the design of the great seven-branched candlesticks of the Jerusalem Temple.

The loss of the Temple brought great suffering to the Jews and many have mourned over it, even until the present time. Perhaps, however, this loss may have provided Judaism deliverance from a primitive and less spiritual expression of devotion to God. For nineteen hundred years the Jews have had no Temple. Since their exile in Babylon the Jews have worshiped in synagogues and have come to believe that God can be found wherever people seek to do his will.

### *Jews in Many Lands*

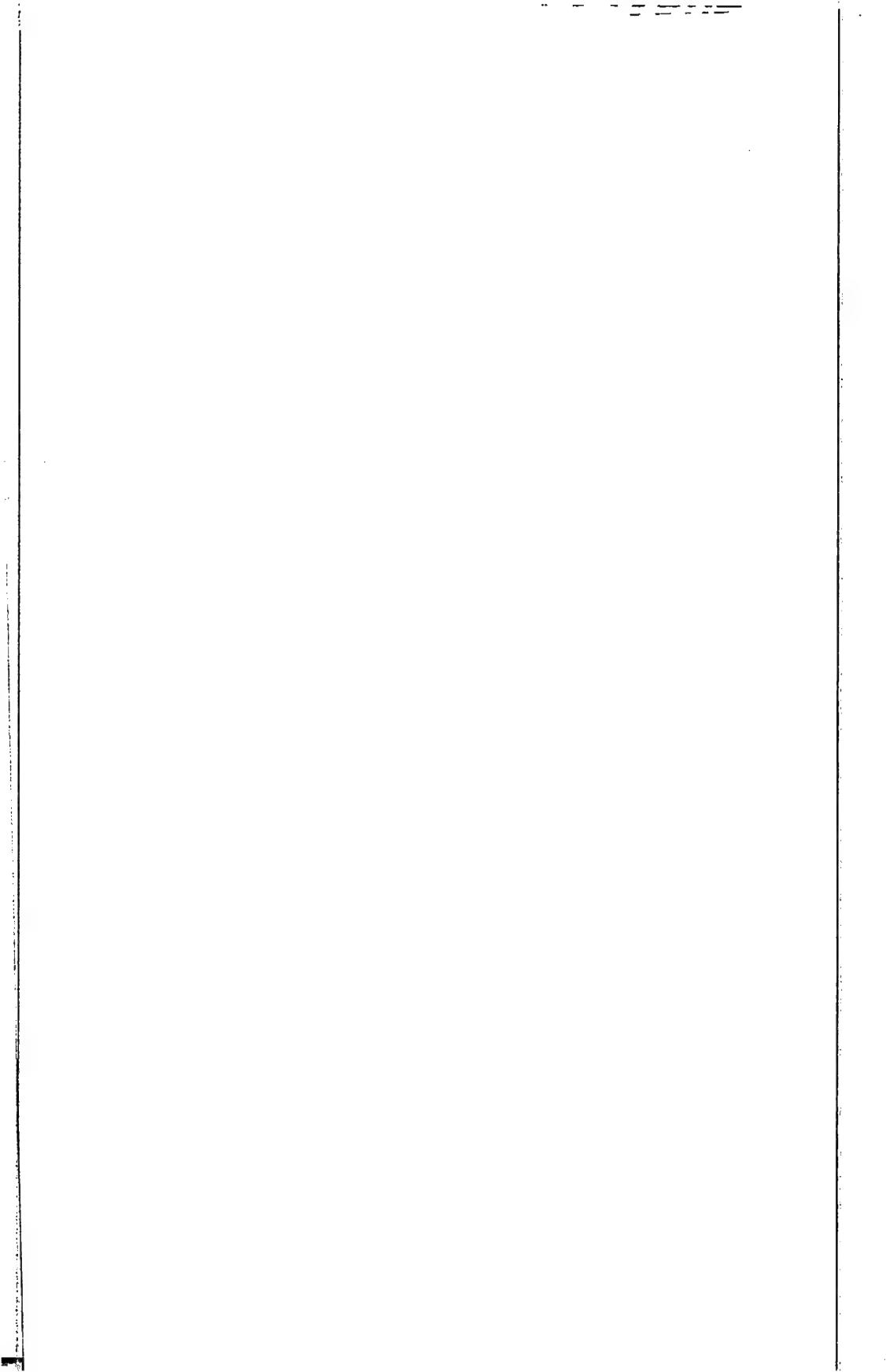
Today the Jews live in many parts of the world, including Europe and the United States. Never again did the Jews rule in Palestine until the war of 1947 that partitioned Palestine and created Israel. Several hundreds of thousands of Jews returned to Palestine to live and to establish a new country, but the Arabs, who have always lived there, do not welcome them. The Jews love the land of their fathers. The story of the Jews in many lands has been a sad one, because people, especially the Christians, have not always wanted them and have persecuted them. Perhaps their greatest suffering came under the rule of Hitler in Germany.

### *The Great Debt of Christians*

It is to the Jewish people that the Christians owe most for the best and noblest in their religion. Christians are particularly indebted to this great people for the Bible and for Jesus, who was a Jew who lived and worshiped as the Jews did in Palestine nearly two thousand years ago. The religion of the Jews and their contributions to the Christians are clearly presented in *Jew and Greek Tutors unto Christ*.<sup>1</sup>

A clearer revelation of the nature of God obviously developed among the Hebrews in the course of centuries. How to serve and to worship God varied from age to age. Objects, ceremonials, sacrifices, and places gave way to a recognition of God as Spirit who prefers man's love, higher motives, righteous-

<sup>1</sup> G. H. C. Macgregor and A. C. Purdy, *Jew and Greek Tutors unto Christ* (Edinburgh: St. Andrews Press), pp. 129 ff., 159 ff.



to Rome. Today the visitor in Rome may still see the triumphal arch of Titus decorated with the design of the great seven-branched candlesticks of the Jerusalem Temple.

The loss of the Temple brought great suffering to the Jews and many have mourned over it, even until the present time. Perhaps, however, this loss may have provided Judaism deliverance from a primitive and less spiritual expression of devotion to God. For nineteen hundred years the Jews have had no Temple. Since their exile in Babylon the Jews have worshiped in synagogues and have come to believe that God can be found wherever people seek to do his will.

### *Jews in Many Lands*

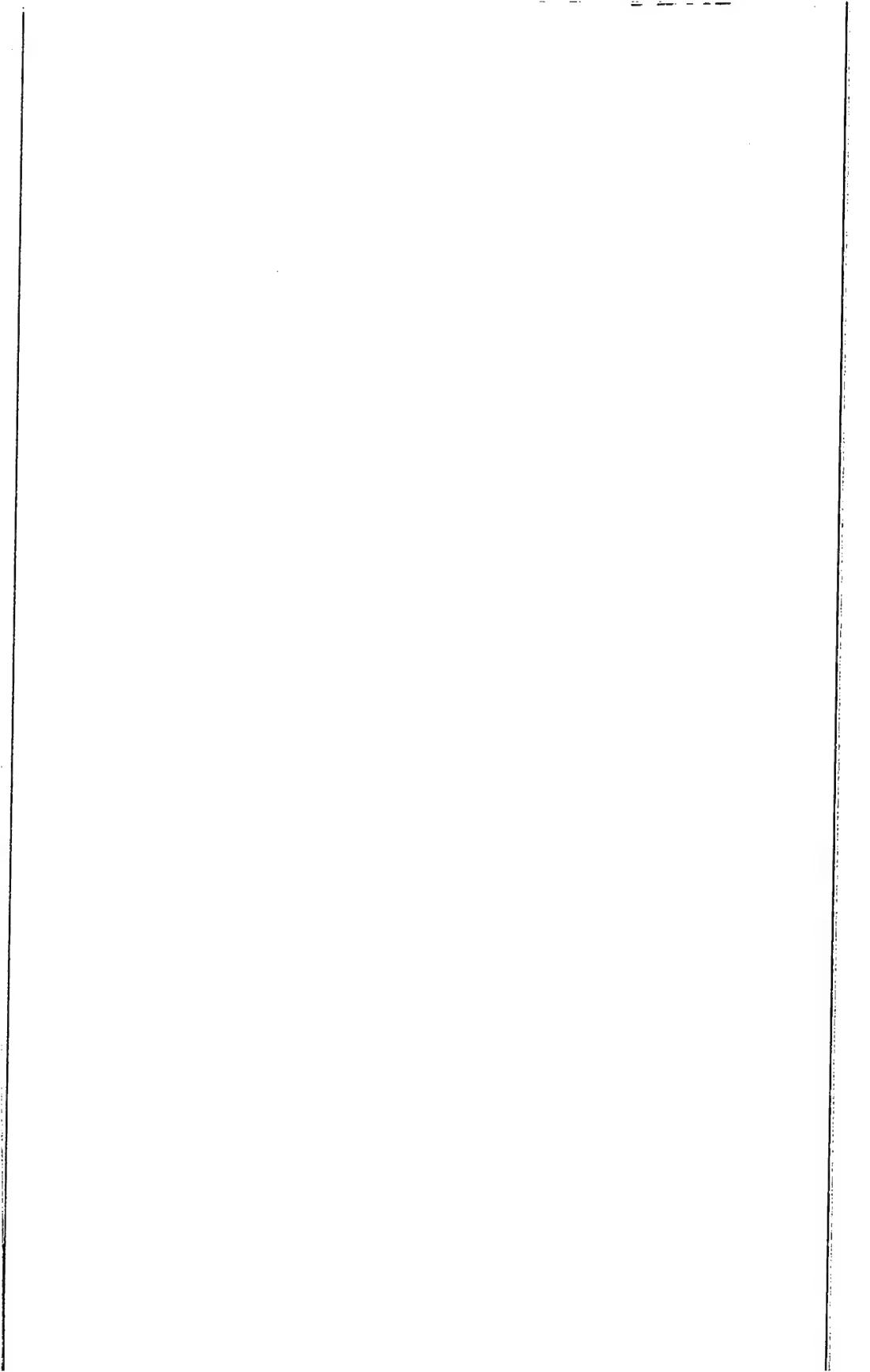
Today the Jews live in many parts of the world, including Europe and the United States. Never again did the Jews rule in Palestine until the war of 1947 that partitioned Palestine and created Israel. Several hundreds of thousands of Jews returned to Palestine to live and to establish a new country, but the Arabs, who have always lived there, do not welcome them. The Jews love the land of their fathers. The story of the Jews in many lands has been a sad one, because people, especially the Christians, have not always wanted them and have persecuted them. Perhaps their greatest suffering came under the rule of Hitler in Germany.

### *The Great Debt of Christians*

It is to the Jewish people that the Christians owe most for the best and noblest in their religion. Christians are particularly indebted to this great people for the Bible and for Jesus, who was a Jew who lived and worshiped as the Jews did in Palestine nearly two thousand years ago. The religion of the Jews and their contributions to the Christians are clearly presented in *Jew and Greek Tutors unto Christ*.<sup>1</sup>

A clearer revelation of the nature of God obviously developed among the Hebrews in the course of centuries. How to serve and to worship God varied from age to age. Objects, ceremonials, sacrifices, and places gave way to a recognition of God as Spirit who prefers man's love, higher motives, righteous-

<sup>1</sup> G. H. C. Macgregor and A. C. Purdy, *Jew and Greek Tutors unto Christ* (Edinburgh: St. Andrews Press), pp. 129 ff., 159 ff.



## 23

# *God's Love Brought to Man*

NINETEEN HUNDRED YEARS AND MORE have come and gone since there was born in Bethlehem a Jewish child whose life changed the world. His parents, Joseph and Mary, were humble people. Though Joseph was a carpenter in Nazareth, his ancestry could be traced back to the famous Hebrew King David.

This Jewish child grew up in Nazareth with four brothers and at least two sisters (cf. Mark 6:3). Because no one at the time he lived wrote a story about him, we know very little about the first thirty years of his life. Long after his crucifixion there grew to be so many devoted friends and followers that several people then wrote letters and books about him. These answered questions that people who had never known him were asking.

A writer called Luke merely says of his childhood, "And the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon him" (Luke 2:40). Luke also tells us that when the boy was twelve years old, he was taken by his parents to the Jewish Passover celebration in Jerusalem. As his parents were starting their long journey homeward to Nazareth, they discovered that their son was missing from their big party of travelers. On the search for him in Jerusalem, they were astonished to discover him in the Temple listening to learned teachers there and asking them questions.

After Jesus returned to Nazareth with his parents, Luke says he "increased in wisdom and in stature, and in favor with God

and man" (Luke 2:52). This young man came to have a daring vision of God for the people of his land. The Romans governed the little country of Palestine. For hundreds of years the Jews had longed for a time when they would be free from oppression and have their beloved country for themselves. The young man heard them talking about armies, battles, palaces in Jerusalem, a kingdom under God, and freedom from Roman rule.

When he went to his synagogue in Nazareth, he listened to the teachings of great Jewish leaders as they were read from the scrolls of the Old Testament, which was his Bible. He heard Jews talking excitedly about God sending them in some far-off time a leader with great power to be their king and who would rule in Jerusalem.

The more he thought about the sufferings of his people and the selfishness and cruelty about him, the more clearly he felt God was asking him to do some special work for his people.

When he was a man of about thirty years of age, he went to hear the devoted religious leader John the Baptist, who was about his own age. John was holding open-air meetings beside the Jordan River, and crowds of people were coming to hear him. John saw that the people of Judea, Galilee, and the other parts of Palestine were failing to do the will of God, so he spoke very sternly to them about their evil ways. Many of his hearers repented and were baptized by him as a sign of a new kind of life.

Among those who listened to him and decided to be baptized, was the young Jewish carpenter from Nazareth. With his baptism, the great decision was clear. He now was certain that God was calling him to do a special work for him. He felt God's spirit within him urging him to be a messenger of God.

He was no longer needed at home. After his father Joseph had died, he had carried on his carpentry business and faithfully cared for the family. His four brothers and (perhaps) two sisters were growing up and were now able to look after their mother. He was old enough to leave home and to carry out God's special work.

In order to make more careful plans, he went away to a desert place where he could be alone to think with God about them. Here he spent several weeks in lonely meditation. There were so many problems to be faced. What was the best way to

help people to live under God's rule of love? How would he get people to listen to him? How should he deal with their hopes and expectations?

One plan that tempted him was to help some of the thousands of poor and hungry people in his land by using God's power to turn the numerous stones all around him into bread. But such magic was not the way to show God's love. The very first step in helping needy people demanded God's love in their own hearts. He undoubtedly knew this from his familiarity with Deuteronomy 8:3, 5.

Another serious temptation came to him because the Jewish people longed to be freed from the government of Rome: Why should he not use God's power to free them, and then become a great ruler himself? As he listened to God he could plainly see that a king with armies could never bring about God's rule of love. Only God could be the supreme ruler and he alone must be served and worshiped, not an earthly king.

A third plan that tempted him was to do something startling, something miraculous like casting himself down from the top of the Temple while he called on angels to protect him. This would attract people's attention to his power. But after many days of careful thinking and praying, he felt certain that God's kingdom could never come by man's power, by wonders, or by magic. Then he cast aside all suggestions that failed to show God's will and love for people (cf. Deuteronomy 6:16).

During the years which he spent quietly at home, he noticed the way many people about him lived. He saw haughty, rich people acting as if they were superior to the common people. He saw people in the market places and in position of power cheating and oppressing the poor. He noticed that religious leaders were sometimes very proud and often neglected to do good to their neighbors.

He thought more and more about God. The grass of the field, the red and purple anemones, and the birds of the air all seemed to speak to him of God's goodness and of his care of all that was around him. He had come to believe that God was like a loving father, surrounding men, women, and children with love and seeking them to live as his children.

So he knew there was another kind of a kingdom, God's kingdom. Here God was to be the Ruler, and his Spirit would

create a new kind of person. In this kingdom men and women would love each other so much that they would not cheat or be haughty or cruel. They would become free of selfishness so that they could love others. They would love people of all races and nations. He thought about God's way so much that he became certain that this must be his work and his message.

Instead of establishing powerful armies, building great palaces in Jerusalem, becoming a popular hero, or using magical deeds to develop a new kingdom, he decided to go about living God's way of love and teaching this great way to others. His decision took enormous courage because the people did not expect such a leader and many would not be pleased to change their ways of living. But his dream of God's kingdom had made him certain that this was the only kind of kingdom that would help his people or would endure. Whenever the kingdom of God should come, people needed to be ready to live under God's reign.

After his desert experience, he began to talk to common folk about God, and about his way of love. He asked people to devote all of their life to God's will. He told them how to show God's love. He taught them to become sorry for wrong deeds, to be kind, eager to help others, unselfish, humble, forgiving, and to be willing to endure hard things in order to do God's will. He told them how important it was to overcome hatred and other evil thoughts and to think loving thoughts of others, even one's enemies. He spoke so earnestly, so simply, and with so much authority that people were glad to hear him.

Often he spoke near the Lake of Galilee. Sometimes he would get into a boat and push out just far enough for the crowds on the shore to see and hear him easily. At other times he climbed up the slopes of some hillside and spoke to the people seated around him on the grass.

In order to spread ideas about God's rule of love, this young man called some simple fishermen to leave their fishing and to join him in his work. He even succeeded in winning Matthew, a tax collector, to join him. Probably Matthew had made much money by collecting taxes from the people for the Roman rulers, but the young man with his dream helped him to see a nobler way of living. Finally he gathered twelve men around him to become his special followers.

He often took them with him when he spoke to the people and always tried to help them to understand God's love for all kinds of people. They became very devoted to him, their leader. But it was difficult for them to give up their idea of a powerful Jewish ruler reigning over their people.

All of his teachings dealt with God's reign or kingdom. The only real ruler or king of men's lives is God. This young teacher saw God as Creator of all nature and of people and therefore as the supreme Ruler of all life. In God's kingdom the supreme law is love.

God's kingdom requires great devotion. Its citizens are the pure in heart, the meek, the merciful, the peacemakers, and those who love justice. It comes when God's rule is established on earth. When it comes, men's hearts will be devoted to God's will. They must love God with all their hearts, with all their minds, and with all their strength. God's righteousness must be man's supreme devotion. This amazing teacher said to people, "You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matthew 5:48).

Such devotion to God may seem impossible, but this young Jewish rabbi declared that God's love was supremely effective, even for the worst sinner. He showed that God was ready to forgive people when they are ready to seek his Kingdom and yield their lives to his goodness and love. He taught his disciples to pray:

Thy kingdom come,

Thy will be done,

On earth as it is in heaven (Matthew 6:10).

More and more people came out to hear him. People waited along the roadside to see him or to have him touch them in the hope that he would heal their diseases. Once some mothers brought their children so that he might touch them. The young men whom he had called to follow him tried to push the children away, but the teacher said, "Let the children come to me, and do not hinder them" (Luke 18:16). Then he took some of the children up in his arms and blessed them.

Many of the Jewish religious leaders were puzzled or offended because this new teacher gave so much time to sinners and to common people who heard him gladly. He ate in the

His love for the poor, for tax collectors who cheated, and for others who had done wrong seemed to have enormous power in changing them. But strangely enough his friendliness for such people brought him increasing criticism from some of the Jewish religious leaders.

One day he decided to ride into Jerusalem on a donkey. He wanted to make clear to the people that he was not coming as a warrior king, but in a peaceful way. Many people who had heard him speak came out to greet him. In a short time there was a crowd surrounding him. Palm branches were waved, garments were spread in his path, and the air rang with the shouts of "Hosanna, Hosanna!"

Each morning he walked to Jerusalem to spend the day at the Temple. In the evenings he returned to the nearby village of Bethany. One day, on his arrival at the great Jewish Temple of Herod, he began to speak about a nobler religion. He even reproved the leaders for their proud ways and for their treatment of the poor and less fortunate people.

His criticism of the old forms of religion and his popularity made some of the Pharisees and Sadducees very angry. A few of them agreed that this teacher was a dangerous person and that he must be put to death at once. Because he had so many followers they knew that it must be done quietly. But the young teacher with his great dream kept right on teaching. He knew that he was in grave danger but he felt that God's plans must be carried out. He was God's messenger to man.

One night he met with his twelve disciples for a supper that became famous and sacred. It was probably the night before the feast of the Passover. He spoke very earnestly to them about his work and God's kingdom. He said, "By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:35). He asked them to keep up the custom of meeting for a supper "in remembrance of me" (1 Corinthians 11:24). He tried to encourage them to go on with his work and to do it all in a loving spirit, even if they were made to suffer and were persecuted. He said that God's kingdom was at hand and he prayed that their faith would not fail. To the very last, his thought was on his precious disciples and, though he knew of his own danger, he showed no self-pity. He also realized that all would be lost if he tried to escape.

But, as was his custom, he sought out a place for prayer. Only God could help him face these grave hours ahead. It was now very clear that his enemies were powerful and were plotting against him. After singing a hymn, the young teacher and his disciples left Jerusalem and walked over to the Mount of Olives. Here he went apart to pray under the olive trees. Judas, who was one of the twelve, was missing. The other disciples soon were fast asleep, so the young teacher was left alone. He began to pray most earnestly for God to help him but above all he said, "Not my will, but thine, be done" (Luke 22:42). Even if he were imprisoned or put to death, he could never give up or deny God's message of love which he had lived and taught during these last two or three years since his baptism (the length of his ministry we do not know).

Just as he had made this great decision as to how to carry out God's will, he saw some soldiers coming through the trees with lighted torches. He became very calm. He was not afraid. But he must have been very, very sad, when he saw that Judas, one of his own twelve disciples, led these soldiers to arrest him! Judas had betrayed him. No one knows why.

Because some of the leaders in Jerusalem could not understand his new message about God's rule, and doubtless because they were afraid of his great popularity, they brought him to trial. None of his disciples or friends was with him. Finally he was bound as a common criminal and taken to the Roman ruler, Pilate. To impress the Roman ruler with the grave charges against their prisoner, some of the Jewish leaders declared, "He stirs up the people, teaching throughout all Judea, from Galilee even to this place [Jerusalem]" (Luke 23:5). The Romans were severe when anyone created disorder and soon Pilate turned over this young teacher, who was Jesus, to be scourged and mocked.

Somewhere on a hillside outside Jerusalem amidst Roman soldiers and his enemies, Jesus was crucified, according to the practice of the Romans. It was during his agonizing hours on the cross, we are told, he looked down in love on the people around him and prayed, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do."

After about three terrible hours, his life must have seemed ended to the Roman authorities and to his enemies. But three

days later, his friends, one after another, began to report their experiences of his presence. Many different stories grew up about these, but one of the first to be written was told by the great Pharisee Paul, who reported that he, who had been an enemy of Jesus' followers, had also become aware of the risen Jesus (cf. 1 Corinthians 15). In him he found a new life of love, with God's will and spirit as the center.

The power of Jesus' life and message now became so great that it spread over all of the Roman Empire, and the people formed many Christian churches.

Letters and books were written about Jesus and after a few centuries the New Testament was compiled from them. This became a part of the Bible for all Christians.

The friends and followers of Jesus became certain that he was the Son of God. Endless books were written and are still being written to describe what God had done through the life of one man, a Jewish carpenter of Nazareth. The writer of the Letter to the Hebrews in the New Testament said of Jesus, that God "has spoken to us by a Son" who "reflects the glory of God and bears the very stamp of his nature" (Hebrews 1:2, 3).

## 24

# *The Revelation of God in the Bible*

THE REVELATION OF GOD IN THE BIBLE is the disclosure of the nature, will, and purposes of God the Creator. It is the revelation of God's love, which has been constant from eternity. God's revelation comes whenever a mind rises to catch glimpses of God's final purpose and insight into his mind and spirit. The Bible tells of one God revealing himself in many ways.

In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets; but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world (Hebrews 1:1, 2).

Isaiah declared "There is no other god besides me, a righteous God and a Savior" (Isaiah 45:21).

Jeremiah said to the Hebrews,

I will put my law within them, and I will write it upon their hearts, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. . . . I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more (Jeremiah 31:33-34).

### *Revelation*

The revelation of the Bible is the evidence of God's love for man, whom he created in his own image. He has entrusted to man freedom, responsibility, and the power to love and grow in perfection. God is continuously seeking man's goodness. Man's response of goodness is preferred above all ceremony, ritual, and sacrificial offerings.

Whatever state a man is in, he is always loved by God who seeks him and sent Jesus, as well as the prophets, to reveal his love and his forgiveness if man turns to him and seeks to do his will. It seems that God desires man to choose, and to be free to become his co-worker and his devoted, loving child. In this, man's position is one of dignity and importance.

### *The Record*

The Bible is a record of people coming to know God, his nature, and his will. There is endless conflict in the people's coming to know the truth. The Hebrews lived amid other peoples who affected them in endless ways. Human beings are always limited by the cultural conditions under which they live. Man's understanding and his devotion to God vary and change. The Hebrew people sinned and adopted endless disagreeable practices. Yet God sought their devotion and they grew more mature, especially some of their prophets, leaders, and writers.

The Hebrews in the earlier portions of the Old Testament practiced slavery and polygamy, and had different standards of morality for men and women. They were often nationalistic and full of enmity and hatred for people around them. They practiced revenge and engaged in many wars.

Their religious views are varied, many, and conflicting. We find stages of change and sometimes real growth. When we read the Old Testament we must see the changes in religion. God does not give people knowledge, facts, or science. He gives of his spirit as people will receive him. The Old Testament is a witness to God's entry into the life of the Hebrews. The amount of truth each person receives differs, depending on his character, his willingness to obey God, his temperament, and much more.

The Hebrews were influenced by their times, their own customs and backgrounds, their mode of living, and by the people among whom they lived, especially in Egypt and Canaan. There is a wrestling or struggle between good and evil ways to be seen in the Old Testament records. God does not spurn human thought, endeavor, or imagination, but uses it, and works through man's limitations. The Bible reflects this interaction of God and man, showing the heights to which God calls man and the depths to which man may fall.

### *Sin and Evil*

The Old Testament describes men as sinners saying, "there is none that does good, no, not one" (Psalm 14:3). Man, however, is created with the capacity for knowledge and fellowship with God. In this he differs from all other living things.

When man turns away from God as the center of his life, he tends to make himself the center. The essence of the idea of sin in the Bible is this attempt to live in separation from God. Evil deeds result when people ignore God's will and try to live without his spirit. A return to God cannot be forced upon any man because all men have the power to choose.

Evil and sin bring suffering. In part, the results fall upon the guilty, but in a moral universe where men have freedom the innocent may also suffer (Luke 13:4-5). The fruits of evil affect all kinds of people, innocent and bad, old and young, rich and poor. In a real sense all fall short of the glory of God.

### *The Moral Order*

God has but one order under which man lives. "The earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein" (Psalm 24:1).

The counsel of the Lord stands for ever,  
the thoughts of his heart to all generations.

Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord,  
the people whom he has chosen as his heritager! (Psalm 33:11-12).

When man ignores or violates God's rule of love, he breaks himself against this moral order. In the affairs of the world, nations, groups, and individuals we see this constantly in wars, strife, prejudice, delinquency, and many of the present situations.

In view of the fact that God is the Creator and Sustainer of the universe (Revelation 4:11) and is the Author of all of its laws and processes, the only way man can live happily, wisely, or well on the earth is to seek always the will of God in every situation he meets. God's will is for man's own welfare and good. It has to do with motive, spirit, and relationship. Whether it is in the family, in the business world, in relation to other races or nations, or in the affairs of government, God's will is to be sought and accepted.

*The Rule of Love*

As God's revelation of his nature becomes clearer in the Bible and most of all in Jesus, it is evident that God is love and his basic will is a way of love. Man is slow to accept this. The Bible contains all kinds of evidence of man's selfishness, prejudice, injustice, and cruelty when he fails to understand or to show God's kind of love toward the people around him. Such love involves the presence of God in man's action. In love, man lets go of self and accepts the people around him as precious creations of God. The action in each situation springs from motives of love, not mere obedience nor the performance of laws. Fears and the bondage to laws give way to generous, outgoing, wholehearted love for the good of other people.

The central place of love is supremely shown in the New Testament. Paul said to the Corinthians, "Make love your aim" (1 Corinthians 14:1a). He describes the nature of love in his great thirteenth chapter of First Corinthians. In place of struggling to follow all of the Old Testament laws, Paul wrote to the Galatians "For the whole law is fulfilled in one word, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself'" (Galatians 5:14). Paul insists that we can be led by the Spirit of God and this can help us in all our weaknesses.

Paul appealed to the Roman Christians to present their bodies "as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God" (Romans 12:1b) as a spiritual worship. Further he wrote "Do not be conformed to this world [age] but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect" (Romans 12:2).

Devotion to the rule of God is clearly described in the Letter of Paul to the Romans.

Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good. Contribute to the needs of the saints, practice hospitality. Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; never be conceited. Repay no one evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. If possible, so far as it depends upon you, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God. No, if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals upon his head. Do not be overcome by evil,

but overcome evil with good (Romans 12:9, 13, 16, 17, 18, 19a, 20, 21).

Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law. Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law (Romans 13:8, 10).

None of us lives to himself, and none of us dies to himself. We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak, and not to please ourselves; let each of us please his neighbor for his good, to edify him (Romans 14:7; 15:1, 2).

In both the Old Testament and the New Testament, we have noticed the emphasis on loving God with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength. Authentic love of God involves loving his creatures. John writes in the First Letter, "Love is of God, and he who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God; for God is love" (1 John 4:7b,8). "He who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him" (1 John 4:16b). "He who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen" (1 John 4:20b). Then the writer of 1 John reminds his readers that we have this commandment from Jesus, "that he who loves God should love his brother also" (1 John 4:21b).

### *Jesus Revealed God's Character*

In Jesus we see God's character. "He reflects the glory of God and bears the very stamp of his nature," says the writer of Hebrews 1:3. Jesus conceived of himself as a "suffering servant of God" bringing a new vision of man's relation to God, and man's resource to triumph over evil forces. In him we see most completely God's self-disclosure of his nature and his will.



# *References for Further Study*

## **1. Understanding the Books of the Old Testament**

Gottwald, Norman K., *A Light to the Nations: An Introduction to the Old Testament*. New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1959.

Grant, Frederick C., *How to Read the Bible*. New York: Morehouse-Barlow Co., 1956.

Harkness, Georgia E., *Toward Understanding the Bible*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1953.

Link, John R., *You Can Understand the Bible*. Valley Forge: The Judson Press, 1966.

Moffatt, James, *The Bible: A New Translation*. New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1954. Useful in finding the oldest writings as they were pieced together by the Priestly authors.

Morganstern, Julian, *Book of Genesis*. New York: Schocken Books, Inc., 1965.

Parmelee, Alice, *A Guidebook to the Bible*. New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1948.

Pfeiffer, Robert H., *The Books of the Old Testament*. New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1957.

Pilkington, Roger, *In the Beginning: The Story of Creation* (grades 5-9). Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1957.

Scammon, John H., *Living with the Psalms*. Valley Forge: The Judson Press, 1967.

## **2. Ancient Lands and Cultures**

Albright, William F., *Archaeology and the Religion of Israel*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1956.

Arnold, William R., *Ephod and Ark*. New York: Kraus Reprint Corp., 1917.

Burrows, Millar, *Dead Sea Scrolls* (illus.). New York: The Viking Press, Inc., 1955.

....., *More Light on the Dead Sea Scrolls*. New York: The Viking Press, Inc., 1958.

Champdor, Albert, *Babylon*. Translated by Elsa Coulth. Chester Springs, Pa.: Dufour Editions, Inc., 1958.

Feagles, Anita, ed., *He Who Saw Everything, the Epic of Gilgamesh* (grades 4-7). New York: William R. Scott, Inc., 1966.

Foster, Genevieve, *Augustus Caesar's World* (grades 5-9, illus.). New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1949.

Frankfort, Henri, *Ancient Egyptian Religion*. Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith.

....., *The Birth of Civilization in the Near East*. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Company, 1959.

Heaton, Eric W., *Everyday Life in Old Testament Times*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1956.

Kramer, Samuel Noah, *History Begins at Sumer*. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Company, 1959.

....., *Sumerians* (illus.). Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963.

*National Geographic Magazine*, Dec. 1957, Dec. 1958, and Dec. 1960. Excellent resources on the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Old Testament.

Perowne, Stuart H., *The Life and Times of Herod the Great*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1959.

Price, Ira Maurice, and others, *The Monuments and the Old Testament*. Valley Forge: The Judson Press, 1958.

Pritchard, James B., ed., *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1955.

....., *The Ancient Near East in Pictures*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1955.

Snaith, Norman H., *The Jews from Cyrus to Herod*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1956.

Terrien, Samuel, *Golden Bible Atlas*. New York: Golden Press, Inc., 1957.

Trever, John C., *The Untold Story of Qumran*. Westwood, N. J.: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1965.

Wright, G. Ernest, *Shechem — The Biography of a Biblical City*. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1964.

Yadin, Yigael, *Masada, Herod's Fortress and the Zealots Last Stand*. New York: Random House, Inc., 1966.

### 3. New Testament References

Baxter, Edna M., *Teaching the New Testament*. Philadelphia: United Church Press, 1960.

Cadbury, Henry J., *Jesus, What Manner of Man?* Naperville, Ill.: Alec R. Allenson, Inc.

Enslin, Morton Scott, *Christian Beginnings*. New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1956.

Kee, Howard Clark, and Young, Franklin W., *Understanding the New Testament*. Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1965.

Nock, Arthur Darby, *St. Paul*. New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1948.

4. Useful issues of *The Biblical Archaeologist*. Published by the American Schools of Oriental Research, Drawer 93A, Yale Station, New Haven, Connecticut.

“Covenant Forms.” Vol. XVII, Sept. 1954.  
“Epic of Conquest.” Vol. III, Sept. 1940.  
“Excavations at Bethel.” Vol. XIX, May 1956.  
“Excavations at Old Testament Jericho.” Vol. XVI, Sept. 1953.  
“Israelite Daily Life.” Vol. XVIII, Sept. 1955.  
“Judean Lachish.” Vol. XVIII, Feb. 1955.  
“King Joiachin in Exile.” Vol. V, Dec. 1942.  
“Lachish.” Vol. I, Dec. 1938.  
“Oriental Law.” Vol. XVII, May 1954.  
“Reconstructing Solomon’s Temple.” Vol. XIV, Feb. 1951.  
“Shechem.” Vol. XX, Feb. 1957.  
“Solomon’s Temple Resurrected.” Vol. IV, May 1941.  
“Synagogues in Palestine.” Vol. VII, Feb. 1944.  
“Temple, Synagogue and Church.” Vol. VII, Dec. 1944.

#### 5. Theology and Religion

Guthrie, Harvey H., *God and History in the Old Testament*. New York: The Seabury Press, Inc., 1960.

Harkness, Georgia, *Understanding the Christian Faith*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1947.

McCown, Chester C., *Man, Morals and History*. New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1958.

Pfeiffer, Robert H., *Religion in the Old Testament*, edited by C. C. Forman. Naperville, Ill.: Alec R. Allenson, Inc., 1961.

Schauss, Hayyim, *Jewish Festivals*. New York: Union of American Hebrew Congregations.

Wickenden, Arthur, *The Concerns of Religion*. New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1959.

Yerkes, Royden K., *Sacrifice in Greek and Roman Religions and Early Judaism*. Naperville, Ill.: Alec R. Allenson, Inc.

